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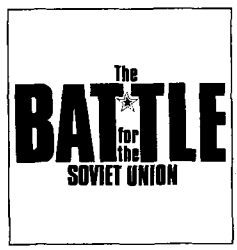

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FROM WASHINGTON

Quayle's case

It's possible that when Dan Quayle was in law school two decades ago and first learned about the so-called "American rule"—that each side of a lawsuit must bear its own costs, no matter who wins—it struck him as absurd and unfair. And it's possible that he thought at the time, "By golly, if I should ever find myself vice president of the United States and chairman of the President's Council on Competitiveness, I'm going to do something about this!"

Possible, but not very likely, is it? Not just because he's Dan Quayle. And not just because Quayle has no record of any passion for legal reform from the day he entered the Indiana bar in 1974 until his controversial speech in front of the American Bar Association on August 13. We no longer expect our political leaders to derive their "issues" from a life's experience or long interest. The political process has become far too scientific to allow for that kind of original thinking. That's what aides are for. Imagining that Dan Quayle embraced legal reform out of sincere reflection is like imagining that Michael Jordan independently discovered the merits of Gatorade.

That doesn't mean that Gatorade, or legal reform, is a bad thing. Quayle's major proposals for curbing the litigation explosion are generally good things. Lawyers are a fat target, but not without reason.

In certain cases in federal courts, and with other limitations, Quayle would replace the "American rule" with the "English rule" that the loser in a lawsuit should pay the costs for both sides. Not only would this curb lawsuits that are frivolous or extortionate (merely intended to induce a settlement in order to avoid litigation). It would actually *encourage* lawsuits that are clearly meritorious. Litigation enthusiasts like Ralph Nader who bemoan the reversal of 200 years of American common law forget that at the peak of the "public interest law" movement in the 1970s, they were pushing for reforms to require corporate defendants to pay plaintiffs' costs—sometimes even if the plaintiff lost. Under Quayle's reform, there would be equal pressure on plaintiffs not to bring worthless lawsuits and on defendants to settle worthwhile ones before trial.

Quayle also takes on punitive damages—money awarded to a plaintiff, beyond compensation for actual harm, in order to punish a wrongdoer. Punitive damages sound reasonable in theory (especially when even a winning plaintiff gets stuck with a big lawyer bill). In practice, because there are no clear standards, punitive damages have turned into a sweepstakes. Juries award millions to a few, nothing to others; corporate defendants are punished again and again in multiple lawsuits for the same episode; punishment that used to be reserved for purposeful or reckless misbehavior is now routinely meted out for negligence or even lower levels of culpability. Quayle proposes a cap on punitive damages, letting the judge rather than the jury set the amount, and requiring clear proof of wrongdoing.

Quayle also proposes limits on "discovery"—the pretrial phase of litigation in which each side peppers the other with interrogations and requests for evidence. Only in America can you give yourself virtually unlimited access to another person's affairs by the simple step of suing him. The cost, time, and invasion of privacy involved in complying with "discovery" make it a bludgeon that can be used by defendants and plaintiffs alike to pervert justice.

Among forty-seven other reforms endorsed by Quayle's Competitiveness Council are limits on the use of "expert testimony"—a plaintiff couldn't hire an "expert" to testify that Gatorade gives you cancer unless that reflected a widespread view among similar experts—and steps to encourage settlement of disputes without trial.

So what stands in the way of sensible changes like these? The self-interest of the legal profession, the inherent conservatism of the bar, the misguided objections of folks like Ralph Nader who believe that nature granted lawyers unique powers to be used for evil and/or good. All that, but also some Republican shibboleths Dan Quayle may not be so eager to discard. When you pick your "issues" at the salad bar, they may not always go together.

First, there's federalism. Quayle correctly sees the stifling effect and cost of litigation as a national problem fully worthy of the attention of the vice president. Yet tort law is traditionally a state affair, and Republicans are known for their concern that the federal bully not trample the garden of states' rights. Even federal courts generally follow state law in their respective locations. The Competitiveness Council timorously proposes "model statutes" on matters such as punitive damages, which it hopes the states will adopt. But in the past the Bush administration also has endorsed federal legislation for tort reform.

The businesses for whom Quayle is so tenderly concerned are equally two-faced on the federalism question. On matters of regulation and corporate governance, they prefer playing the states off against each other and usually end up incorporating in Delaware. When state courts get too frisky for their taste, they are suddenly national institutions demanding national restrictions.

The traditional Republican hostility to regulation is another barrier to litigation reform. As a way of setting standards for corporate behavior—on the environment, consumer health, worker safety, whatever—it is both fairer and more efficient for one agency to make the rules and set the penalties once and for all than for judges and juries to litigate the question again and again, coming up with a different answer each time. But it is not unusual for conservatives to oppose some regulation or other on the grounds that the matter ought to be left to "the common law."

Finally, there is the callous Republican attitude toward the social safety net. Other advanced societies, it's true, are not as obsessed as ours is with the various individual risks of modern life, and do not stage orgies of litigation whenever something goes wrong. But these other societies are generally far more protective of their citizens against the risks of life in general: of getting sick, of losing a job, of just being one of life's losers. Societies that do protect losers in general are in a better position to say "them's the breaks" when something specific goes wrong.

The trouble with litigation as a method of social justice is its randomness. It only compensates for certain kinds of misfortune, compensates erratically (sometimes inadequate, sometimes overgenerous) even for those, and eats up more than half the proceeds in the process of redistributing them. But curbing litigation does not solve the problem of social justice. Perhaps that could be Dan Quayle's next project.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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CORRESPONDENCE

No glory

To the editors:

In "How Do They Do It?" (August 5) Charles Moskos demonstrates that the Army has been converted from a 1970s race relations disaster into today's all-American institution. Occasionally, he refers to this or that minor imperfection. But even in today's integrated Army a marked drop-off in percentages of black officers occurs from junior to senior levels, a preponderance of disciplinary actions involving black servicemen persists, and significant indicators of racism continue throughout the reserve and National Guard.

Perhaps the most serious vestige of lingering racial prejudice relates to military history itself, which is replete with omissions and distortions of the role of black fighting men (and some women) for more than 300 years.

For example, the 24th Infantry Regiment served during 1950-51 in Korea longer, for extended periods, in frontline action than other American regiments. Time and again, in some of the bitterest fighting and under some of the most difficult conditions ever encountered by the U.S. Army, these brave soldiers distinguished themselves. Yet official history shows mostly that they ran away from the enemy repeatedly until the regiment was deactivated on October 1, 1951, a humiliation that has never been visited upon a regular regiment engaged in frontline action. Their "poor" combat performance is officially cited as the principal reason the Army began in 1951 to integrate. Now, forty years too late, the military history is beginning to be revised.

DAVID K. CARLISLE
Los Angeles, California

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Dismal impact

To the editors:

Paul Gewirtz's "Discrimination End Game" (August 12) was an amazing example of the doublespeak he deplores. He needs to come down from his ivory tower and see the real impact of affirmation action programs before he so blithely supports them. Specifically, his article failed to address the issue of white males being laid off in order to create positions for minorities.

Case in point, in the past twenty years, my father, a white tradesman in Boston, has been laid off several times because his shop either had to hire more minorities or lose its contract. He is specifically told so to his face. In the early '70s one such layoff preceded a recession that put him out of work for over a year and a half and left our family nearly destitute. He is in a similar situation today. With twenty years of seniority, his unemployment benefits running out, he has been told by union officials that there is work only for foremen and minorities. If one were to tell a black worker that he was being laid off so some white guys can work, what do you think would happen? The inability of white men to sue successfully is the embodiment of disparate impact.

MICHAEL COLLINS
Monterey, California
(Via 900 number)

To the editors:

In his otherwise thoughtful essay on the disparate theory of discrimination, Paul Gewirtz wrote the following: "The Supreme Court is no longer an institution that minorities look to as a distinctively safe harbor from majoritarian politics." I was under the impression that the makeup of the Court was a direct consequence of majoritarian politics. What Mr. Gewirtz is really saying is that one brand of majoritarian politics—the liberal, Democratic brand, which favors racial and gender preferences and quotas—is somehow "good" majoritarian rule, whereas conservative, Republican majoritarianism, which opposes these practices, is "bad" majority rule.

It follows from this distorted logic that the writer would like to have Congress assume greater responsibility in the civil rights field. I too think the legislative branch should exercise greater responsibility in dealing with controversial matters, but not because the Supreme Court is no longer "a distinctively safe harbor from majoritarian politics."

GEORGE A. LEVESQUE
Albany, New York

Pseudo-jingo

To the editors:

Charles Krauthammer's description of the role of countries other than the United States in the Gulf coalition ("The Lonely Superpower," July 29) strikes this foreigner as remarkably arrogant.

The Gulf war, he declares, "was an example of pseudo-multilateralism.... The United States recruited a shi[illegible]er, rented a brigade there, bought (with skillfully deployed sticks and carrots) the necessary U.N. resolutions to give its actions a multilateral sheen."

This is either purely figurative speech or, if intended to be factual, offensive to (for example) the men of the Desert Rats and other British army, naval, and air units who fought beside American forces and who, indeed, suffered casualties (some of them from American "friendly fire"). They were "rented"? Who, exactly, paid the rent, apart from their families and British taxpayers? Who paid the rent for the French armored units and the many other units, large and small, provided by countries poorer than the United States? Apart from the Israelis, who got $650 million from American taxpayers precisely for keeping out rather than fighting, only the Egyptians got any tangible benefit, in the form of debt written off.

For the record, at the end of January 1991 the United Kingdom had committed to the Gulf coalition 42,000 men; France, 13,500; and other countries, 155,000. Relative to the resources of these countries, these were large commitments. Mr. Krauthammer's cynicism is wildly unsubstantiated and lacking in respect for all those soldiers—Arab and European—who risked their lives. And Mrs. Thatcher—she was strong-armed by George Bush? Wasn't it, perhaps, the other way round?

MARTIN STANILAND
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Fevered critic

To the editors:

Stanley Kauffmann's review of *Jungle Fever* ("Intermittent Fever," July 29) has reinforced the sense of unreality I've experienced over the general critical reaction to this work. The adulation of the national press, led by the relentless fawning of *The New York Times*, has made me wonder whether the sodden home movie I saw is the same film that critics are solemnly treating as a powerful modern classic charged with hitherto unsuspected sociological insights. To be fair, Mr. Kauffmann doesn't go overboard, and indeed

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

SEPTEMBER 9, 1991

THE RUSSIAN RESOLUTION

As we write, the first news of the apparent collapse of the Moscow coup of August 19 has arrived. We still cannot know how this extraordinary and rattling event will play out in the next few days; who its beneficiaries will be; who, among the military, the KGB, and the Party apparatus, will emerge as the central conspirators. What we do know, however, is that, like a bee that stings one last time before it expires, this putsch is the final spasm of a system that is coming steadily (or, rather, unsteadily) closer to extinction. Most important of all, perhaps, is the fact that it was thwarted not by a countercoup, or by an equally illegitimate conspiracy of the left, but by the courage of the peoples of the Soviet Union.

What we have witnessed was at times tragicomic: the ludicrous, pseudo-legal invocations of Mikhail Gorbachev's ill health; the remarkably contagious flu that then spread throughout the Soviet leadership; the archaic rants put out by the Tass news service; the Pavlovian reaction of Soviet embassies around the world; the miserable front man Gennadi Yanayev, a Communist, as he once put it, "to the depths of my soul." But finally, even though the gang couldn't shoot straight, this was not funny. The coup was the brutal act of an elite besieged. Its leaders' resort to ancient Stalinist rites was a form of orthodox obeisance to a doctrine in which they can no longer believe, but without which they can find no comfort. These Stalinists were at least intelligent enough to see that they were living posthumously, and they panicked.

The attempted brutality, the failed attempt to marshal the Soviet army in the old repressive way (see "Uniform Failure" by Gabriel Schoenfeld, page 9), was a way in which they could protect their offices, their perquisites, their privileges, their picture of Soviet reality. All of these, we are pleased to say, will now become things of the past.

But the coup served another purpose. It brought to a sudden, chilling climax the contradictions that have plagued the Soviet Union since Mr. Gorbachev's ascent to power. The swift, shabby failure of this conspiracy should not obscure the fact that the reform of the Communist political and economic culture of the Soviet Union has not been, will not be, smooth. The coup was a reminder that the institutions of Soviet authoritarianism were never going to relinquish power of their own accord, and that the forces for democratic change, however nebulous and young, were never going to tolerate the survival of those institutions. A decisive reckoning between these two forces was bound at some point to take place.

The shadow of this reckoning is now long. It stretches to Mr. Gorbachev's own paradoxical place in history. He is a man who depended on the system, yet who also recognized that the system had to be undone. From the very beginning, in other words, he was trapped: obliged to use the instruments of the old regime to abolish it. As his political reforms began to take root, it became increasingly clear to Mr. Gorbachev that the success of

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his enterprise would be marked by his own obsolescence. He too declined to live posthumously, and so he began to tack and tilt, to maneuver when he should have leapt, to slow down the change to which he had contributed so much speed, to calibrate the day of judgment. As the democratic energies he unleashed grew stronger, both in the outlying republics and in Russia itself, he was constrained to reassure the Communist "center" that he was still loyal to it; as he promised one side revolution, he was obliged to promise the other side renewal. He found himself in the intellectually and politically absurd position of arguing that there is a place between freedom and unfreedom.

The result was a succession of contradictions. His abandonment of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe was accompanied by repeated affirmations of communism; his moves toward economic liberalization were balanced by his clampdown in the Baltic states. He negotiated an agreement with the republics that would have ceded control of Soviet territory forever, but balked at an attempt at market capitalism and sought finally to appease the military and secret police. Throughout, he represented a force for Soviet continuity at the moment of the greatest discontinuity in Soviet history, when the Soviet idea was finally bankrupt. Sometimes it seemed that Mr. Gorbachev could not quite grasp the enormity of what he was involved in, or the ruthlessness of its meliorating logic. He never understood that the institutions he relied upon were institutions that would not go gentle into the good Communist night.

A part of his mistake (and many commentators in the West shared it) was to think in Eastern European terms. For in those countries the force of the Gorbachevian contradiction was blunted. This was not merely because some of those countries have traditions of liberalism upon which dissidents and reformers could lean. It was also because a foreign power could be blamed for the structures of control. The fight against communism in Central and Eastern Europe was also a fight against imperialism, against a foreign occupation, and so reactionaries could find some common ground with liberals in the struggle. Moscow could be blamed for everything. Guilt could be washed away by the excuse of occupation. Something of that same logic, moreover, can be felt in the Baltic states and across the Soviet republics. There the resolution also seems relatively simple: the occupiers could be scapegoated. The banner of genuine sovereignty, long suppressed, was one under which many could march.

But in Russia everything was different. In Russia there is no liberal patrimony. In Russia the foreign power *was* the domestic power. The old regime could not retreat, because it had nowhere else to retreat to. It could only disappear. The rolling reckoning that began in Central Europe and had slowly been closing in on the center could no longer be pinned on someone else. Thus Mikhail Gorbachev faced a choice: be eclipsed by the new democratic force of the Russian republic, or be ousted by his Soviet allies. In the end, of course, the choice was made for him, and the real battle for the future of the Soviet Union was joined. The reason that Boris Yeltsin was able to rally the forces of opposition to the coup was the reason Mr. Gorbachev was not: he was elected. He glows with legitimacy. He represents a real nation. He had made the intellectual and political leap required of the times. For that reason, he could be symbolic of more than his own interest in power, and the streets could fill up in his support.

The delusion of Washington, as the coup began, was to believe that there was something we might have done that could have affected these momentous events; that, by a large promise of cash at the London summit, the coup might have been avoided; that, by a more flexible approach to arms control earlier, the collapse could have been postponed. As usual, we flatter ourselves. The last few days have shown beyond a doubt how naive and self-regarding such judgments are.

The editors of this magazine have long argued that an American policy toward the Soviet Union that was centered on Mr. Gorbachev, centered on the center, is a historic error, and represents a failure to grasp fully the profound change that has occurred in the last few years in that region. And as it turned out, Mr. Gorbachev has indeed become a sideshow to the real battle between democracy and its enemies. He may have been Act I, but the drama is now well into Act II. Moreover, we were never under the illusion that the United States could affect the ultimate course of events. The historic forces at work—the grand collapse of the Communist lie, the implosion of a transcontinental empire, the latest twist in the old struggle between Russian liberalism and reaction—were too profound and too powerful and too indigenous to be swayed by anybody but the peoples in that region themselves.

Indeed, the West's attempts to manipulate recent change in the Soviet Union now look more than foolish. The Bush administration's construction of a "new world order" on the fragile shoulders of Mikhail Gorbachev has been rendered moot by events. The very obsession with Mr. Gorbachev—which Mr. Bush continues to labor under—was a way of forgetting the deeper collision of forces that we are now witnessing. But it was also a way of undermining the integrity of American foreign policy. Mr. Gorbachev may well survive these events. But his role, already minimal, will now surely be eclipsed by the new powers of the sovereign republics, emboldened by their stand against the old regime, secure in their newfound democratic legitimacy. And American foreign policy will need to adjust.

Eventually it will be reconstituted. Now, however, the diplomatic imperatives are plain enough: firm support for the governments of the sovereign republics; unequivocal backing for the elected government of Boris Yeltsin; a clear sign that we will encourage the speedy bringing to account of the ringleaders of this coup.

This last week has finally provided answers to some of the most hotly debated questions of recent years. Has a transformation really taken place in what used to be

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called the Soviet Union? Is it, in whole or in part, irreversible? Do such notions as popular sovereignty, the rule of law, and independence for the republics hold more than a veneer of support among the people of that continent? Many doubted it. They should doubt no longer. The organs of Soviet authoritarianism came up against the force whose name they and their predecessors have taken in vain for most of this century: the people. The irony is delicious. Of course, the struggle is not over yet. There are other forces of reaction in the Soviet Union, more popular forces; and the Soviet economy is still a basket case, and a potential occasion for political recidivism. Still, this much is clear: in the spirit of Budapest 1956 and Prague 1968, the Soviet Union finally turned around in Moscow 1991 and invaded itself. And the invasion failed.

NOTEBOOK

SLEAZEBALL WATCH: It was a comforting thought for liberals trapped in Washington during the 1980s that influence-peddling was primarily a Republican vice. Alas, the BCCI scandal has exposed the illusion that paroled Reaganites were the only insiders selling their rolodexes to the highest bidders. The list of lobbyists in the August 26 issue of *Newsweek* includes many saintly liberal Democrats. Clark Clifford, who fronted for BCCI at First American, is joined by Hill & Knowlton p.r.-man Frank Mankiewicz. His firm worked for BCCI and helped First American try to discredit claims in a 1990 *Regardie's* article that it was linked to BCCI. Former Representative Michael Barnes, a leading critic of the Reagan administration's Central American policy, leaned on publisher Bill Regardie to warn him about printing the article. Former Iowa Senator John Culver, who also worked as a lawyer for BCCI, tried to get his clients an advance copy of a 1989 Congressional Report on money laundering that included references to the bank. And Andrew Young's consulting firm got $50,000 a year to introduce Agha Hassan Abedi, BCCI's founder, to world leaders. The spirit of liberalism isn't dead, it seems. It's just up for hire.

THE FORGOTTEN MAN: A homeless person, Martin Henn, was arrested in Baltimore last July on charges of setting fire to a car. When he didn't appear for his preliminary hearing a month later, a warrant was immediately issued for his arrest. Henn was eventually found in prison. He had been forgotten there for more than a year without formal charges being brought against him and without an opportunity to speak to a lawyer. Unfortunately, this doesn't appear to be unusual in Baltimore. When state officials took over the city jail this summer to ease the city's budget crisis, they found at least sixty-five prisoners were being held without trial dates, two even longer than Henn. Last year Baltimore officials initiated a nationwide search for a narcotics suspect who they said had escaped, only to find him guess where. "The criminal justice system throughout the country is so overburdened with cases that it's unavoidable that there will be some people who slip through the cracks," explains LaMont Flanagan, acting commissioner of the state Division of Pretrial Detention and Services. Aren't people who slip through the cracks in prison supposed to get out?

P.C. R.I.P.: According to a survey released by the American Council on Education, the debate about political correctness on campus is largely mythological. Only a small percentage of the 359 senior administrators who responded to a questionnaire sent by the group reported "controversy over the political or cultural content of courses, speeches, or lectures." But asking a senior administrator whether there's trouble at his school is a bit like asking the local sheriff whether his town is going up in flames. Administrators are peacekeepers, and a worthless sample for the purpose of judging levels of controversy. If ACE Vice President Elaine El-Khawas really wants to know what's going on, she should try the survey again. This time ask the editors of campus newspapers, or perhaps the teachers.

RED LIGHT DISTRICT: When we tweaked trade publishers as "Houses of Ill Repute" a few months ago, we didn't mean it literally. Random House, however, is off and running with the metaphor. On August 12 it held the launch party for a new novel in a New York topless bar. The novel, *Topless*, was written by D. Keith Mano, a contributing editor of *Playboy*. "It's a bit unusual, but unusual things cause unusual sales," Random House chairman Alberto Vitale told *The Wall Street Journal*. Perhaps Mr. Mano will write a sequel about Mr. Vitale's stewardship of Random House. He could call it *Bottomless*. •

The ragtag Red Army.

UNIFORM FAILURE

By Gabriel Schoenfeld

The coup, we now know, failed. But is there a reason to believe it could ever have succeeded? The Soviet armed forces—the critical instrument of control—were already in acute crisis. The coup leaders never successfully dispatched the military into the fray. To launch their desperate plot they

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surely counted on military support, but their hopes were founded on a delusion.

The junta's prime instrument would have been the Internal Troops, controlled by the MVD, the Interior Ministry. Their charge is the preservation of domestic order, but they are not entirely ethnic Russian and their mettle had never been tested in an internal conflict of this type. Although Boris Pugo, the interior minister, sat on the emergency committee, the political allegiance of the troops under his control is still a mystery. And even if they were reliable, their manpower—roughly 300,000—would never have been able to put down an entire empire.

The OMON (Special Mission Militia Detachments) forces, better known as the black berets, also fall under the formal control of the MVD. These crack units were thought to be the most loyal and brutal troops at the new regime's disposal. But there are only thirty-five units of them. Estimates of their total manpower range from 10,000 to 30,000 men. And getting them to do the junta's bidding would have been more complicated than is generally assumed. In the Baltics, where their roving patrols had already left several dead, they were commanded directly by Moscow. But elsewhere they reported to local outposts of the MVD, where loyalties in the post-coup atmosphere were deeply confused. At best, the OMON units would have been able to mount a brutal display of force, which might have galvanized opposition as much as held down revolt.

Like the MVD, the KGB has its own private armies. It has approximately 40,000 special purpose troops—*spetsznaz* forces, as they are called. Their mission is counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and, in wartime, to wreak havoc behind enemy lines. In the espionage and defector non-fiction genre they are painted as bloodthirsty criminal killers in the service of the state. But the lurid portrait was always probably more fiction than fact, and in any case their ability to hold down mass revolt was extremely dubious. The KGB also has 230,000 border troops, but, stretched along the country's enormous frontier, they were in no shape to come to the junta's aid. Other KGB special units provided secure governmental communications and safeguarded the USSR's nuclear weapons. Useful, no doubt, but not exactly for clinging to power.

The regular army, with 1,473,000 troops, was the junta's weightiest, but dullest, sword. Conscripted from the population, its ethnic composition and the political attitudes of its rank-and-file soldiers mirror the society at large. Although Russians are prone to wild exaggeration, the most recent statements by ranking Soviet military officials and reports in the Soviet press make it clear that these troops were in no state for an operation as massive and as ambitious as a successful coup would have required.

Over the past six years many soldiers have caught the anti-communism disease. Forty percent of servicemen who voted in the Russian republic elections cast their ballots for Boris Yeltsin. Even Defense Minister and coup plotter Dmitri Yazov has been compelled to admit that "the army has sustained considerable losses in the ideological struggle for the minds and hearts of the younger generation." One reason that servicemen think incorrect political thoughts is because life in the Red Army is very harsh. Newly released figures published in the magazine *Kuranty* show that in the past fifteen years 120,000 soldiers died, even without counting casualties from Afghanistan. Suicide accounts for 50 percent of these deaths, with death from "inflicted injuries," a euphemism for homicide, responsible for another 20 percent.

The widespread and intractable practice of hazing is one source of the high morbidity; ethnic conflict is another. An episode in the Carpathian military district is typical. Fighting erupted between Kazakh soldiers and members of another Central Asian national group stationed at the same base. According to the temporarily banned newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, soldiers at the base regularly "waged implacable 'night-time' battles among themselves" in their barracks and "fights and insults had become a customary occurrence." In a December 1990 skirmish, fifteen soldiers, including the unit's deputy commander for political affairs, were wounded in an exchange of gunfire. "The state of the army reflects the situation in society," commented the prosecutor of the Carpathian military district who investigated the affair.

The discipline problems spring in part from the trouble in finding a few good men. The pool from which draftees are selected is shrinking. Several factors explain the trend. The number of young men found unfit for service on account of poor health is rising, a reflection of the growing health problems in the society at large. As a result of health and other deferments, only 43 percent of the draft-age population is eligible to serve. As the pool shrinks, the educational level of the troops is experiencing a sharp decline. In 1988 only 2.2 percent of draftees lacked a high school education. By 1990 the number of high school dropouts being asked to serve had increased sixfold. Lieutenant General Ivan Matveyev, who has responsibilities in the manpower area, says that the army's "intellectual standard is falling." What is worse, he told *Izvestia*, of every Soviet draftee one in four has a criminal record. An army populated with hooligans and thieves "has an extremely negative impact on the entire combat readiness of our units," he warned.

Those who are summoned for duty don't always show up. In 1990, 86,000 recruits neglected to report to induction centers. This year the spring recruitment campaign was "much more complex than in the fall of last year," Matveyev says. In Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia, and Azerbaijan, the plan was fulfilled by 100 percent. But in the remaining eleven republics the results were poor. Some of the soldiers in these areas are said to have been eager to serve. "We have spoken to many of them," says Matveyev. "They repeatedly told us that they would have gone to serve ...

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but they were afraid that the local authorities would oppress them for taking such a step." The top-ranking political commissar in the military, General Nikolai Shlyaga, said in a recent Red Star interview that the shortfall is "increasing the tension of military service" as well as heightening "physical and moral and psychological fatigue."

The overworked soldiers and officers are underhoused. In Moscow alone, according to the military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda*, there are 10,800 officers' families without apartments; 500 of the officers either fought in Afghanistan or were called in to help extinguish the Chernobyl nuclear reactor. Today they are "in the position of refugees." Defense Minister Yazov said recently that providing housing to servicemen and their families is a problem that "continues to remain acute" across the country. In April he said that 192,000 families were without housing. Many husbands are forced to live apart from their wives: one in five among officers' families, one in three among those officers returning from abroad. According to Shlyaga, the military has lost the "source of accommodation acquisition" because an "immense quantity of apartments is being retained by those who are no longer linked with the Ministry of Defense." What is to blame for the shortage of military housing? Shlyaga blames "economic autonomy and the market." It is no accident that the junta immediately said that building more housing was its top economic priority.

As in civilian life, food for the troops is scarce, particularly for soldiers stationed in enemy territory like the Caucasus and the Baltics. The Defense Ministry's recent plan for improving supplies involved taking 9,700 tons of meat and meat products, 49,500 tons of milk and dairy products, 2,900 tons of vegetable oil, and 4,300 tons of sugar out of the USSR government reserve for troops and officers in the rebellious regions. In addition, 13,900 tons of "edible fish products" were to be allocated to the military. These delicacies were to be made available "by means of reducing the market allocation to specific consumers," Sovietese for civilians.

Even before the coup, the military's growing set of domestic functions was causing discontent. Along with corruption and privilege came the new political functions the military was supposed to perform. Military patrols of urban centers to combat crime and the injection of paratroopers and other units into conflicts in the Baltics and the Caucasus were steps that came in for open criticism not simply from civilians but from soldiers and senior officers as well. Demoralized from within, with decreasing levels of physical and political support, the Soviet military had begun to crack long before August 19. No one should be surprised that it proved useless in the execution of the coup.

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD, the editor of *Soviet Prospects*, is a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Abolish the Senate Ethics Committee.

BAD COPS

By Michael Waldman

Just before Congress left for its summer break, Senate Ethics Committee chairman Terry Sanford and vice chairman Warren Rudman held a press conference to unveil a decision that made the committee's dive on the Keating Five case look courageous: they were dropping the investigation of New York Senator Alfonse D'Amato. The panel issued no report, released no evidence, and took its action even though thirty-four witnesses—nearly half the total number called—had refused to testify, citing their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. Rudman truculently refused to spell out the evidence the committee had gathered. "You got three weeks?" he snapped. One reporter asked Sanford what lessons the decision gave other lawmakers. "Be careful," he replied. A few minutes later, a jubilant D'Amato bounded to the microphone, claiming vindication.

Once again the Senate Ethics Committee has let a scandal-tarred colleague off the hook. (One widely circulated joke goes: "The good news is, there's going to be a war crimes trial of Saddam Hussein. The bad news: it's before the Senate Ethics Committee.") But the D'Amato decision has prompted rethinking of the committee's role. Most of the time the committee issues advisory opinions to lawmakers and staff on relatively minor matters ("A lobbyist gave me a pocket calculator. Can I keep it?"). Throughout the years it has done this without incident. But where it has stumbled is in its adjudication of matters involving campaign fund-raising, constituent service, and legislative priorities—essentially, the entire money economy of Capitol Hill.

This raises a fundamental question: Can an ethics panel composed of members of the Senate club—who are themselves caught up in a fund-raising frenzy—discipline even the most naked influence-peddling? Clearly, if legislators are to be held to any standard higher than that of criminal law, there's no choice but to acknowledge fully the inherent failure of the current ethics system. Instead, corruption cases should be handled by an outside counsel that reports to the full Senate—and to the public.

The D'Amato case is just the most recent example of the committee's spinelessness. Numerous press reports have detailed how he used his office to steer government funds to his contributors or his brother Armand's law clients. In its nine-page press release, the Ethics Committee flicked these charges aside:

D'Amato's protégés at HUD, with the senator's prodding, channeled huge grants to his campaign contributors in Puerto Rico.

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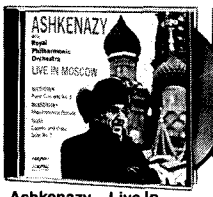

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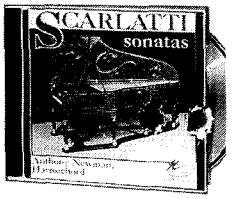

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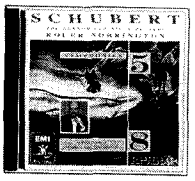

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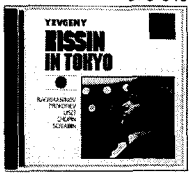

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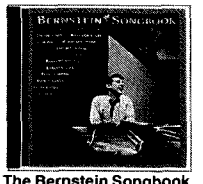

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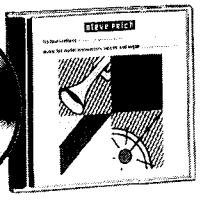

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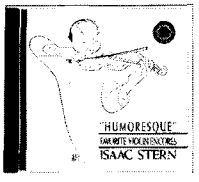

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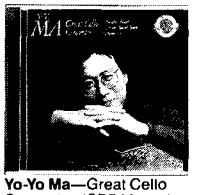

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Since so many witnesses took the Fifth, the committee said there was "insufficient credible evidence" to move forward. Instead of keeping the file active until the criminal cases are resolved, however, the committee went out of its way to give the appearance of exoneration. Sanford declared: "This case is closed."

D'Amato helped get HUD houses for his relatives and supporters. Insufficient evidence "within [the committee's] jurisdiction"—which may mean the scams took place before D'Amato was elected (or it may not).

Armand D'Amato used his brother Al's staff, stationery, and autopen to help win a contract for a client, Unisys. This was indeed "inappropriate," but the committee chose to believe D'Amato's implausible assertion that he didn't know what was going on.

Twelve more charges, branded "frivolous" by Rudman and Sanford, included at least one, in which Armand's clients got a HUD grant, that is under grand jury investigation—and another, involving phone calls on behalf of gangsters, that former U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giuliani has blasted as improper. More galling still, the whitewash came as the senator's top San Juan fund-raiser, Lopez Ballori, was indicted for allegedly giving campaign gifts under fake names; one grand jury is examining the HUD-Puerto Rico pipeline; another is investigating alleged fraud in the awarding of HUD houses in Long Island; and a third is probing Armand D'Amato and Unisys. According to *Newsday*, federal prosecutors have concluded that there is enough evidence to indict Armand.

This wasn't the first time that the Ethics Committee has proved unwilling to grapple with evidence of endemic corruption. The panel itself was created in 1966 as a response to a previous whitewash. When the Senate Rules and Administration Committee investigated LBJ protégé Bobby Baker, who made himself a millionaire through favors from lobbyists, it found "many gross improprieties," but no legal violations. The backlash from Republicans led to the creation of a new ethics committee.

From the beginning, though, the new panel rarely served as the disciplinary board its proponents hoped. In 1966 top staff to Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut discovered that he had lined his pockets with office and campaign funds. They considered going to the Ethics Committee—but realized that would be futile. Instead, they leaked the evidence to Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson. Only when Dodd boldly, or foolishly, demanded an Ethics Committee investigation did it act, recommending censure of the senator. The committee didn't put forward a code of ethics until a decade later, in 1977.

The House Ethics Committee is generally a somewhat sterner tribunal, as former Speaker Jim Wright will attest. In 1989 it took the unprecedented step of recommending disciplinary action against Wright for laundering honoraria through bulk sales of his book. This tougher stance is made possible because the House is a much more impersonal place than the fratlike Senate; House Ethics Committee members may not even know the target of their investigation personally.

Abscam was another less than shining moment for the Senate. In 1980 seven House members and Senator Harrison Williams were snared in the FBI "sting." (The lawmakers were shown being bribed by a phony Arab sheik, played by an FBI agent.) The House Ethics Committee quickly began disciplinary proceedings. But the Senate panel didn't even begin its investigation until after Williams was indicted, tried, and convicted of bribery and conspiracy in 1981.

The paralysis didn't become truly apparent until the Keating Five investigation last year. The story of the senatorial Lincoln brigade is well known—how Charles Keating, in the process of looting his savings and loan, channeled $1.4 million to the campaigns or causes of five senators, and how those senators in turn pressured regulators to back off "our friend." Outside counsel Robert Bennett argued strenuously that Alan Cranston, Dennis DeConcini, and Donald Riegle should be punished for their role. In particular, he stressed that the three senators' conduct gave the clear appearance of being linked to Keating's campaign donations, an essential standard given the difficulty of proving that a gift actually swayed the lawmakers' conduct.

In a transparent bit of scapegoating, however, the panel chose to punish only Cranston, who was ill with cancer and who had already announced his retirement. Riegle and DeConcini were chided, but their cases were effectively dropped. For five months the panel failed to take the next step and actually vote to recommend a censure. In July, reportedly, some panel members began to argue that even Cranston should not be punished. Conceivably, leniency for D'Amato would be accompanied by clemency for Cranston—a bipartisan hostage swap.

Meanwhile, the committee has begun to come apart. Howell Heflin and David Pryor left the panel, complaining of the strain. (Pryor suffered a heart attack soon thereafter.) Senator Jeff Bingaman joined the committee, boned up for two months on the Keating case, then announced that his wife's law firm, Akin Gump, had been representing Cranston, so he too would quit. The committee still hasn't reached its full contingent. Frustrated by the committee's temporizing on Cranston, Senator Jesse Helms released a 274-page report, based on Bennett's recommendation, urging that the Californian be punished. "I am concerned that the Ethics Committee may be unable or unwilling to hunker down and do what I am convinced we simply must do to resolve the 'Keating Five' matter," he wrote. He also warned that at a private meeting of the committee, "There apparently was some sentiment on the Ethics Committee to issue a truncated report—or no report at all.... I cannot and will not be a party to that." Jesse Helms as Daniel Ellsberg: the mind reels.

Clearly this dog won't hunt. In fact, this Ethics Committee is worse than none at all, given its proclivity to hand out "I'm innocent" badges to miscreant legislators. At the same time, we do want legislative bodies to be governed

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by some internal standards. A better way should be found.

Helms proposes that the panel be replaced by a commission of retired senators and/or retired judges. But replacing a panel of senators with a panel of former senators of the same mindset doesn't exactly solve the problem. A genuine citizens' panel, in turn, while possibly having greater independence, could just as likely be made up of K Street lobbyists. (After all, until recently Clark Clifford would have been on a short list for any such panel.)

Appointing special counsels is a better idea. Whether because of honor, ego, concern over professional reputation, or devotion to the rule of law, these hired attorneys have been more doggedly interested in the truth than their congressional employers. In the Wright case, Chicago attorney Richard Phelan hammered at the Speaker so vigorously that the Ethics Committee had little choice but to take some action. Bennett, the Keating investigator, made the committee so uncomfortable that they wound up jousting with him. (We don't know how D'Amato counsel Henry Scheulke performed, since the proceedings were in secret and the committee hasn't released his report.)

Given the Ethics Committee's implosion, the time is right to replace it with a permanent Senate special counsel, appointed jointly by the majority and minority leaders, to investigate and bring ethics actions. (Such bipartisan selection is how the head of the General Accounting Office is selected, and that's one of the most effective parts of Congress.) To decide whether to launch an investigation, the counsel would use the same criteria the Ethics Committee does now—based on allegations from the public, other lawmakers, press reports, or prosecutions. The counsel could interview witnesses in private, or could conduct public hearings. It might make sense to require that each investigation include open sessions. Following an investigation, the counsel would issue a public report and recommendation for action directly to the full Senate, bypassing a committee vote. That combination of independence and publicity will make it hard for senators to muffle scandal in a blanket of bipartisan chumminess.

To work, this new system would need to be accompanied by clearly defined rules of what is and isn't acceptable conduct. (See "Quid Pro Whoa," March 19, 1990.) Current Senate rules are maddeningly vague, requiring only that conduct not be "unethical, improper [or] illegal," and shed no light on the blurry distinction between legitimate constituent service and sleazy contributor service. But Congress can't ignore the mother of all ethics reforms: public funding of congressional campaigns. The average senator now must raise $12,000 *per week*, largely from favor-seekers, to win re-election. If neutral public funding replaced congressional dependence on S&L owners and HUD developers, the job of an ethics committee would become much simpler. But even then having senators judged by their own fraternity makes as much sense as appointing Bart Simpson hallway monitor—for life.

MICHAEL WALDMAN, director of Public Citizen's Congress Watch, is the author most recently of *Who Robbed America? A Citizen's Guide to the S&L Scandal* (Random House).

Giuliani's lost convictions.

RUDY'S REVERSALS

By James Traub

Rudolph Giuliani hasn't been U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York since he retired to run for mayor of New York in the spring of 1989, but his reputation—indeed, his whole crusading approach to crime-fighting—is being questioned after the fact. In the past few months convictions in major white-collar cases that were framed while Giuliani was in office have been overturned one after another. In March the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals set aside the securities fraud conviction of James T. Sherwin, the president of the GAF Corporation. In May the court voided the racketeering conviction of E. Robert Wallach, Ed Meese's friend and Wedtech's tireless influence-peddler. In late June the guilty verdict in the Princeton Newport tax fraud case was partially overturned. And last month the parade of humiliation was capped when the Second Circuit set aside the verdict in the case of Ivan Boesky's erstwhile friend John Mulheren, who had also been found guilty of securities fraud.

"I have been around the courthouse since 1959," says Charles Stillman, a prominent white-collar lawyer, "and I have never seen a string of reversals like this one. The rule used to be that you could expect one reversal on a major case every decade." The appeals judges, Stillman concludes, "must really have been upset about something."

Were the reversals a repudiation of the famous white-collar prosecutions of Giuliani's last years in office? Wall Street's defenders have maintained from the outset that Giuliani targeted business practices that were unorthodox rather than criminal, and sent people off to jail for making money in aggressive, but widely accepted, ways. The appeals decisions may be read as a vindication of this argument, as some commentators, particularly *The Wall Street Journal*, in an editorial titled "The Greed Decade Reversed," have argued.

The fact is, you cannot read the appellate decisions without being disturbed by the way some of these cases were prosecuted and some of the indictments were framed. Giuliani lived close to the line that separates virtuous zeal from recklessness, and occasionally he crossed it. That being said, however, the reversals don't mean that the indictments oughtn't have been brought in the first place or that Giuliani pursued innocent men out of moral hubris. An honest reading is that the prosecutors, like the defendants, were acting in a gray area where the

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rules were unclear. So, for that matter, was the Second Circuit; and the judges, who once resolved all the hard issues in favor of the government, supported defendants who were the sorts of respectable characters for whom the judges might have felt a twinge of empathy.

Giuliani caught the public imagination in a way that no prosecutor had for a generation. He was, unmistakably, a warrior for justice: with his drab suits and his flapping hair and his high-pitched, nasal delivery, he was a man consumed by the job of catching bad guys. He assigned himself to prosecute Stanley Friedman, the former head of the Democratic Party in the Bronx and the most powerful of the half-dozen or so prominent political figures his office indicted. What's more, Giuliani had the nerve to authorize the placing of a wiretap in the office of Friedman's lawyer, Thomas Puccio. Puccio was an old friend of Giuliani's, and secretly recording a defense attorney is close-to-the-edge behavior. But when one of Giuliani's assistants said that Puccio would be having a conversation that might entail an attempt at obstruction of justice, Giuliani's only response, according to Jack Newfield and Wayne Barrett's *City For Sale*, was, "Record it."

Giuliani won a conviction against Friedman, and the wiretap became a forgotten footnote. As long as he won, and his cases were upheld on appeal, his tactics seemed unassailable. And he always won. In the so-called Commission case, his assistants brought home convictions against the heads of the major Mafia families for rigging bids in the New York City concrete market. And after each new victory he would hold one of his patented press conferences, a verbal cocktail of ambition, vanity, and zeal. "He was playing to the crowd that reads *The New York Post*," as a former assistant U.S. Attorney says, "and frankly, that was fine with me. It was the Tom Dewey model prosecutor, the crusader."

Giuliani's self-aggrandizement could be offensive or merely ludicrous, but the melodrama was an inextricable element of the crusade. He was the darling not only of the *Post* but also of *The Village Voice*, since his scorn for the powerful seemed to have almost a liberal cast to it. And at first he had few detractors beyond the criminal defense bar, whose members he tended to treat as obstacles to his all-out war rather than as esteemed colleagues and pillars of the old-boy network.

Eventually he turned his sights on the high and mighty of Wall Street. Unlike Friedman or Tony Salerno, the Wall Street bankers whom Giuliani pursued were respectable, dignified figures. When Giuliani treated them the same way he had treated the Mafiosi and the corrupt pols, he began to earn some serious enemies. Probably the most infamous episode of his entire term was the arrest of a somewhat confused middle-aged investment banker named Richard Wigton, who was handcuffed in his office and dragged down to court. Giuliani, as always, was acting symbolically; he was saying that corrupt bankers deserve treatment no better than street thugs.

The problem was, he didn't have the goods on Wigton. The initial indictment was dropped, a new and more comprehensive one promised, months passed, then a year, and finally the office announced that Wigton would not be charged. Wigton appeared to be a victim of the Giuliani crusade: an innocent pawn used to make a political statement. And with the Wall Street cases, where the law was complex and relatively untested, grand statements were sure to lead to mistakes.

The defendants in the Princeton Newport case, who ran one of the country's most profitable investment firms, were accused and convicted of making sham stock transactions to create tax losses. They argued on appeal that, so long as they believed the deductions might have been legitimate, they could not have committed a crime, even if the transaction was precisely as the government described it. The Second Circuit overturned the convictions on the ground that the trial judge had failed to instruct the jury that such a belief would preclude a guilty verdict. On a separate stock manipulation charge, however, a guilty verdict was upheld.

What really upset the white-collar bar about Princeton Newport, though, was not the difficult question of what constitutes legitimate belief, but the fact that the defendants were charged under the RICO racketeering law, a statute designed to combat the Mafia and other criminal organizations. RICO's provisions permit the government to seize defendants' assets before trial and forfeit them after a conviction. It had never before been employed in a tax fraud case, and it may never be again, since during the course of the trial the Justice Department issued new guidelines prohibiting the use of the law in pure tax cases. The Princeton Newport defendants claimed that prosecutors had inflated a case that belonged in the tax courts into a federal crime, and then amplified it, in a manner "grossly disproportionate to the conduct alleged," into a racketeering conspiracy. The appeals court did not decide the merits of the claim, but it's hard to disagree with. The RICO charge had the same vindictive feel as the Wigton handcuffs.

E. Robert Wallach was also indicted under the RICO law, and with only slightly more justification. RICO requires only that a defendant commit two or more "predicate acts" in furtherance of the alleged conspiracy, and Wallach was, in fact, charged with conspiring with Wedtech on several separate occasions. But no evidence emerged at trial that this dreamy, self-righteous attorney was aware of Wedtech's innumerable crimes, and to say that his own activities constituted an ongoing criminal enterprise seems absurd and unjust.

The case that has provided the most satisfaction to Giuliani's enemies is that of Mulheren, in part because the appeals decision contained some of the most stinging language. Mulheren was found guilty of manipulating the price of Gulf & Western stock at the behest of Boesky, who wished to unload his huge block of shares at a price slightly above its trading level. Boesky, who

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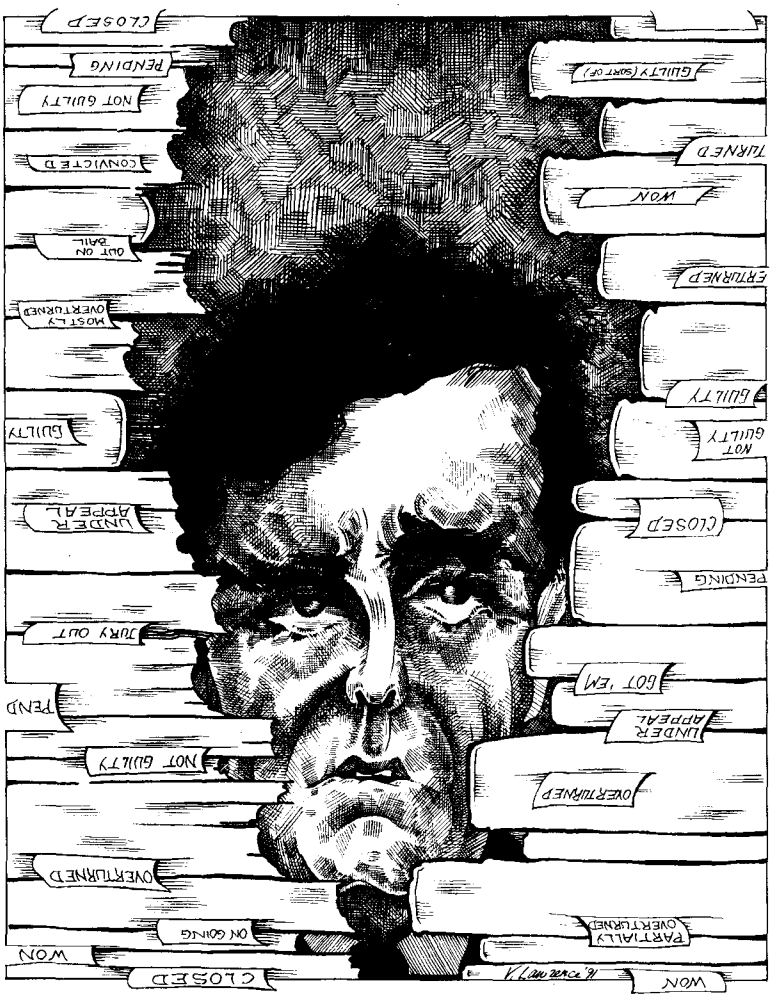
turned out to be an extremely recalcitrant witness, recalled that the crucial phrase he used to induce Mulheren to drive the stock's price upward was, "It would be great if it traded at 45." The court, in reaching the rare decision that the jury had convicted without sufficient evidence, said that "to hang a conviction on th[is] threadbare phrase ... defies reason and a sense of fair play." The court also pointed out that Mulheren purchased the shares with little or no attempt at secrecy and that he received nothing from Boesky for his efforts, despite losing $64,000 on the deal.

Securities and tax cases such as these raise genuinely hard questions, which involve issues of fact as well as law. In an article in *The New York Law Journal* seeking to interpret the reversals, John C. Coffee Jr., a professor at Columbia Law School, observed that in white-collar cases, unlike, say, armed robbery cases, "The actual act is typically equivocal and often morally neutral; thus, guilt depends on a process of inference by which the fact-finder tries to decipher the defendant's intent." Coffee argued that the Second Circuit had become increasingly sensitive to the high threshold of intent required in such cases.



RUDOLPH GIULIANI BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

This is, of course, a very long way from saying that these cases should never have been brought in the first place. And it's important to note that most of the decisions in the reversed cases hinged on actions or omissions by the trial judge rather than the prosecutors. Only in the Wallach case, in which two of three appeals judges asserted that prosecutors "may have consciously avoided knowing" that the key government witness had lied on the stand, did anything remotely like prosecutorial misconduct serve as the grounds for reversal.

And just because the government loses at trial or on appeal doesn't mean that the case should not have been brought. Even some of the defense lawyers in the cases admit that the call was a very close one. Wallach, for example, has been presented as a martyr of prosecutorial recklessness in the pages of *The Wall Street Journal* and *The American Lawyer*. But the government's two principal witnesses, who had been found credible in previous cases, both maintained he had taken $300,000 from the company in exchange for help he would provide once he got a job in the Justice Department; a long trail of memos lent credence to the assertion. As with Princeton Newport, the use of RICO seems unjust, but the case might well have been brought without it. The Mulheren case appears questionable—though what may have been the strongest part of the case, involving allegations of "stock parking," never reached the appeals court since the trial jury deadlocked on conviction.

These were defendants who had a sophisticated enough knowledge of the law that they could work around its edges. They may have felt protected by the obscurity of the law. Should they have? Should the fact that you're working the gray areas give you a free pass, at least for criminal prosecution? Judge Kimba Wood spoke directly to this proposition when she said, in sentencing Michael Milken, "You may have committed only subtle crimes not because you were not disposed to any criminal behavior, but because you were unwilling to commit crimes that were likely to be detected."

Moreover, it's possible to see the string of court reversals not as justice having its day, but as the system's way of fighting back—"a right-wing Republican backlash," as one former assistant U.S. Attorney puts it. Most of the Second Circuit judges are not only Republican appointees but members in excellent standing of the old-boy network that Giuliani offended with his moralism and contempt for chumminess. Current and former assistants who are inclined to see the reversals in this light point out that several of the cases were reversed on the sorts of narrow issues that the court has traditionally dismissed as "harmless error" in narcotics or organized crime cases. Issues like "collateral perjury" may have gained in status when the defendant, E. Robert Wallach, gained in status.

In any case, the danger of overzealous prosecution is

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now long gone. Giuliani is in private practice, as are almost all of his chief lieutenants. The public atmosphere conducive to prosecutorial crusades has dissipated, in part because so many of the Masters of the Universe have been humbled. The real danger now is the one Wood pointed to—that the gray area will become a decriminalized zone, that a sophisticated professional with a sophisticated lawyer will know that he can't go too far wrong. The old-boy network was delighted when one of its own, Otto Obermaier, was appointed to succeed Giuliani. The new U.S. Attorney is fond of quoting Justice Robert H. Jackson to the effect that "the citizen's safety lies in the prosecutor who tempers zeal with human kindness, who seeks truth and not victims . . . "

Of course, it's the balance that counts. Giuliani, with too much zeal, created too many victims. Obermaier, with his genuine concern for prosecutorial discretion, does not sally out in search of crime; he waits for federal agents to bring him cases. He does not target celebrities; he does not hold press conferences. He has not used RICO in a white-collar case to date. Few major cases have come out of the office during his tenure. His assistants go home at 6:00, and wonder what they're doing. Is that how you vouchsafe the citizen's safety? Or is the cure worse than the disease?

JAMES TRAUB is the author of *Too Good To Be True: The Outlandish Story of Wedtech* (Doubleday).

Liberals should think again.

THOMAS'S PROMISE

By Jeff Rosen

As Clarence Thomas prepares to face the Senate, liberals are continuing to portray him as a bizarre, unpredictable, conservative activist—a justice who might strike down child labor laws, subvert the civil liberties of all but the unborn, and banish women from the workplace because the Creator commands them to be wives and mothers. Kate Michelman of the National Abortion Rights Action League calls Thomas's writings "very devastating, and shocking . . . a smoking gun." Laurence Tribe of Harvard suggests that Thomas's views about natural law threaten "the fate of self-government in the U.S." Erwin Chemerinsky of People for the American Way warns that Thomas has "openly allied himself with [Robert] Bork's philosophy." And the NAACP has concluded that "Judge Thomas's conservatism generally favors a government's interest over an individual's."

Thomas's judicial philosophy, of course, is still opaque. His writings are limited, and even his law review articles are more polemical than scholarly. "I have not been someone who has had the opportunity or the time to formulate an individual, well thought-out constitutional philosophy," he confessed during his last confirmation hearings. But certain themes recur throughout Thomas's writings, and they show that his views have been not only caricatured but turned on their head. Far from being a judicial activist, Thomas has repeatedly criticized the idea that judges should strike down laws based on their personal understanding of natural rights. Far from being bizarre or unpredictable, Thomas's view of natural rights is deeply rooted in constitutional history. And far from being a statist like Robert Bork who would pander to governmental authority, Thomas describes himself as a libertarian who sees the Declaration of Independence as "the strongest defense of individual rights against collectivist schemes."

In his unpublished "Notes on Original Intention," written after the Bork hearings, Thomas criticizes conservatives such as Bork and Edwin Meese who believe that each clause of the Constitution should be interpreted in light of the specific intentions of the people who framed it, without reference to the higher law principles that underlie the entire document. Thomas argues that the Constitution is "unintelligible" without reference to the Founders' belief in natural law—objective principles of morality that can be discerned by human reason. Drawing on eighteenth-century social compact theorists such as John Locke and Francis Hutcheson, the Founders believed that individuals are born with certain natural rights—in particular, the rights of life, liberty, property, and speech, the rights of religious conscience, and the right of revolution. When individuals form governments, they surrender (or "alienate") control over some of their natural rights, but others are "inalienable" and—as Madison declared in the Ninth Amendment—"retained by the people." Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. invoked Jefferson's principle that all men are created equal to denounce slavery and segregation. In the same tradition, Thurgood Marshall invoked natural law in his brief for *Brown* v. *Board of Education*.

Ironically, liberal groups such as the Women's Legal Defense Fund and People for the American Way have decided that Thomas is "firmly outside the mainstream of legal thought" *because* he takes seriously the Founders' belief in natural rights. During the Bork hearings, however, former Representative Barbara Jordan and Senator Joseph Biden argued plausibly that the "original intention" nominee was "outside of the mainstream" because he *didn't* take natural rights seriously. ("As a child of God," said Biden, "my rights are because I exist.") It is also ironic that Tribe fears that Thomas might enforce natural rights as a Supreme Court justice. During the Bork hearings Tribe testified: "I am proud that we have . . . a 200-year-old tradition establishing that people retain certain unspecified fundamental rights that courts were supposed to discern and defend."

What has changed, of course, is not natural rights but

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the nature of the Court. When liberal justices still had a shot at five votes, liberals encouraged them to discover rights not explicitly listed in the Constitution. Justice Brandeis in the 1920s and Justice Goldberg in the 1960s, for example, invoked the Founders' belief in "the significance of man's spiritual nature" to argue that the Constitution protected a right to privacy. Now that the conservatives are in control, the prospect of judges pulling natural rights out of a hat suddenly has liberals scared. During the 1930s, after all, a conservative Supreme Court invoked the sweeping guarantees of the due process clause (no person shall be "deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law") to protect the natural "liberty" of employers and employees to be free of minimum wage laws.

But in Thomas's case, fears of judicial activism seem to be unfounded. Like many liberals, Thomas believes in natural rights as a philosophical matter, but unlike many liberals, he does not see natural law as an independent source of rights for judges to discover and enforce. The most concrete evidence of this is the Supreme Court opinion that he calls "one of our finest examples of natural rights or higher law jurisprudence": Justice Harlan's 1896 dissent in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson*. In holding that "separate but equal" railway cars violated the original intent of the Framers of the equal protection clause, Harlan never mentions natural rights or natural law explicitly. But, Thomas maintains, Harlan's reliance on the Declaration of Independence and on the principle that all men are created equal was "implicit rather than explicit, as is generally appropriate for Supreme Court opinions."

Using the same reasoning, Thomas told the Heritage Foundation in 1987 that the "God-given" equality of all men provides a "basis for aggressive enforcement of civil rights laws and equal employment opportunity laws designed to protect individual rights." Natural law for Thomas, then, is a way of providing "moral backbone" for rights that are explicitly listed in the Constitution, rather than a license for creating ones that aren't. This distinction is familiar in natural law theory. In his 1975 book *Justice Accused*, Robert Cover explains that many abolitionist judges who believed that slavery violated natural law resigned from the bench rather than substituting their personal beliefs about fugitive slave laws for explicit constitutional protections.

In particular, Thomas would not enforce natural rights through either the Ninth Amendment or the due process clause, as his critics have charged. In a recent essay for the CATO Institute, he wrote that the Ninth Amendment, understood in its historical context, "has great significance in that it reminds us that the Constitution is a document of limited government." (Bork, by contrast, had dismissed the Ninth Amendment as an "inkblot," which Thomas criticized as "legalistic" at the time.) But, Thomas continued, to say that the Ninth Amendment gives the Supreme Court powers to strike down legislation "would seem to be a blank check." Thomas, in other words, sees natural law as "the best defense of limited government," because it requires judges to recognize the limits of their own authority out of respect for the sovereignty of the people.

As for the due process clause, liberals like Tribe fear—and conservative activists like Stephen Macedo hope—that Thomas will invoke his personal understanding of natural "liberty" to strike down economic regulations. Like many libertarians, Thomas has indeed criticized minimum-wage laws because he believes they discriminate against poor, black teenagers. ("I never would have had my first job if I had to make the minimum wage," Thomas told *Policy Review* in 1985.) But Thomas draws clear distinction between his economic beliefs and his judicial philosophy. In an otherwise approving review of *Changing Course*, Clint Bolick's 1988 book about civil rights, Thomas wrote: "At times, Bolick's libertarianism goes too far. He even endorses an activist judiciary that would strike down laws regulating the economy.... At this point, Bolick appears to have lost sight of the higher law background of the rights he zealously seeks to defend."

Thomas's emphasis on the connection between natural law, individual rights, and limited government is part of what he calls his "very strong libertarian leanings." "I don't think that government has a role in telling people how to live their lives," he told *Reason*, a libertarian magazine, in 1987. "Maybe a minister does, maybe there's another set of moral codes, but I don't think that government has a role." And Thomas's libertarian suspicion of government is clearly reflected in his judicial philosophy. Unlike Bork, Chief Justice Rehnquist, and other statist conservatives who are reluctant to strike down laws under any circumstances, Thomas does not seem inclined to defer to the president or Congress when they violate clearly enumerated individual rights. "Conservatives should criticize not only arbitrary courts, but also arbitrary or willful government in general," he wrote in a 1989 issue of the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*.

In an unpublished speech at George Mason University Law School last fall, Thomas criticized the Supreme Court's 1984 decision in *Chevron* v. *Natural Resources Defense Council*, which held that when rulings of executive agencies conflict with policies set by Congress, courts should defer to the agencies. In the *Rust* v. *Sullivan* case this spring, Thomas might well have voted to strike down a Reagan administration regulation that bars federally financed family planning clinics from discussing abortion. Chief Justice Rehnquist's opinion relied on the *Chevron* decision in holding that the interpretation of an anti-abortion bureaucrat was a "plausible construction" of the congressional statute, even though the language of the statute suggested otherwise. Thomas's reluctance to defer automatically to the executive when individual rights are at stake could be important in an age of divided government, in which conservative federal agencies can reinterpret their congressional mandates at will, unless Congress can fight back with veto-proof majorities.

How would Thomas's views about governmental

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power and natural law influence his decisions on the Supreme Court next term? In First Amendment cases he appears to be a strong civil libertarian, and during his brief tenure on the D.C. Circuit he showed a willingness to protect speech despite its offensiveness. Last May, for example, he joined Chief Judge Abner Mikva in striking down a law that imposed a twenty-four-hour ban on "indecent" television. In another case Thomas agreed that "the loss of First Amendment freedoms, for even minimal periods of time, may constitute irreparable injury." In *R.V.A.* v. *St. Paul*, the Supreme Court will decide whether "hate speech" such as burning a cross on private property is protected by the First Amendment. Thomas, presumably, would vote with Justice Scalia, who ruled that flag burning is constitutionally protected, rather than with Chief Justice Rehnquist, who tends to be less scrupulous about First Amendment rights.

And then there is *Roe* v. *Wade*. Thomas's most controversial statement is a single sentence in a 1987 speech he delivered at the Lehrman Auditorium of the Heritage Foundation: "Heritage Foundation Trustee Lewis Lehrman's recent essay in *The American Spectator* on the Declaration of Independence and the meaning of the right to life is a splendid example of applying natural law." Thomas says nothing else about the article, so it isn't clear whether he actually agrees with Lehrman's conclusion that fetuses have inalienable rights, or whether he was merely flattering his host. But even if Thomas does agree with Lehrman as a moral matter, his judicial philosophy would preclude him from enforcing the natural rights of fetuses as a judge. "That would be a violation of my oath," he said when Senators Biden and Charles Grassley asked at his last confirmation hearings whether he would strike down laws based on his personal understanding of natural rights.

As for the right to privacy, it's unlikely that Thomas believes the Constitution protects it. He has criticized Justice Goldberg's concurring opinion in *Griswold* v. *Connecticut* for its "discovery, or rather invention" of the Ninth Amendment, so it seems fair to assume that he also believes Justice Douglas invented a right to privacy when he found one in constitutional "penumbras." On the other hand, Thomas acknowledges in his "Notes on Original Intention" that privacy is a right "most Americans believe they hold." But nothing else in Thomas's writings suggests that he would vote to uphold *Roe* v. *Wade*.

Liberals, in any case, have painted themselves into a corner. Having now endorsed the proposition that judges should not enforce extraconstitutional rights, they themselves will find it harder to defend *Roe* on constitutional grounds. This tactical error will be the most significant legacy of the Thomas hearings. "We're going to Bork him," the National Organization for Women has promised. But if they succeed, liberals may discover that they have Borked themselves.

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Western inflation and the Soviet economy.

FALLEN STAR

By Stephen S. Moody

The soldiers and tanks in Red Square represent a military response to profound economic crisis in the Soviet Union. The one thing we can be sure of in the current convulsion is that this kind of response is not a solution. Before the dust can ever settle, before the last tank pulls out and rumbles off into history, all Soviets will have to learn that they can't win economic battles with military machines.

This lesson was seventy-odd years and millions of lives in the learning. Sadly, even now, not everyone gets it. The lesson teaches that ideology doesn't excuse a society from obeying certain, apparently universal, economic laws. State monopolies, fixed prices, and nonconvertibility don't immunize a currency from outside economic influence. Shortages are not an alternative to sound budgetary finance. Marxist cant is no substitute for capitalist practice. In terms the Old Guard can understand, you can't fight inflation with bullets.

And what has been largely missed in the analyses of the Soviet Union's current economic plight is that inflation is the issue. The origins of the Soviets' stunning economic free fall were not merely in the inherent inefficiencies of the command economy. They were also in the Western inflationary cycle that began in the early '70s, and permeated even the farthest regions of the

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Soviet empire. Western inflation, led by escalating world oil prices, lured the Soviets out of their postwar isolation into expanded trade and commerce with the West. The contact was lethal: the Soviets exported oil and imported huge doses of dollar-based inflation that they chose to ignore. The same inflationary forces that Paul Volcker fought and defeated in the United States ten years ago finally turned around and brought the great Soviet economy to its knees.

Twenty years ago few could have foreseen the devastation Western inflation would visit on the Soviet economy. After all, the Soviet Union was an isolated economy: its prices were fixed, its currency was non-convertible, and it conducted relatively little trade with the West. What's more, the Soviet Union sat atop the world's largest proven reserves of natural gas, the second-largest reserves of crude oil, and it was a veritable treasure chest of gold, platinum, silver, and diamonds, to say nothing of the baser metals, coal, and timber. How could commodity-based inflation, of the kind that flared in the early '70s, do anything but benefit the Soviet economy? That's probably what Leonid Brezhnev asked.

In 1970 signatories to the Bretton Woods Agreement (the Soviets declined to join in 1944) abandoned the gold standard. The world's reserve currencies were allowed to float and, within a year or so, gold jumped from $35 to $135 an ounce. In 1973 the price of oil quadrupled to $13 a barrel, and the prices of a host of other industrial commodities took off. Not until ten years later, in 1979-80, did oil prices peak at $40 a barrel and gold top out at something over $800 an ounce. By then short-term U.S. interest rates had spiked to more than 20 percent. It had been the United States' first scrape with double-digit inflation in a very long time.

The Soviets did not raise ruble prices or interest rates in sympathy, but they didn't ignore Western inflation either. Maybe they should have, because they grossly misinterpreted the signals inflation was sending. Moreover, right around this time, it seems, greed replaced revolutionary fervor. Indeed, sky-rocketing commodity prices represented a huge windfall for the Soviets. Of course, the windfall was in dollars—not rubles: ruble prices, remember, were fixed. But the Soviets had no problem with dollars. As usual, a few extra dollars on the side would come in handy. The Soviets could put them to use for the common good.

There were, for example, the hard-currency expenses of ongoing Soviet foreign policy initiatives in Vietnam, Angola, Cuba, and elsewhere. These operations were long-term diplomatic investments, and far from "self-financing," their expense had become a significant drain on Soviet hard currency reserves. A portion of the dollar windfall could cover that. Then there was the ever increasing cost of high-tech military weapons. National security was the issue here, and not a ruble would be spared to maintain its readiness. The problem was, Soviet research wasn't keeping pace with Western developments in, say, missile guidance systems and super-silent submarine technology. More and more the Soviets were having to spend dollars, not rubles, to "procure" the designs, the processes, and sometimes even the hardware needed to catch up.

Well, petrodollars would close that gap, and at the rate oil prices were climbing, there would be petrodollars aplenty. Enough, no doubt, to satisfy some of the citizenry's rising expectations. So Brezhnev decided to import a few consumer products that Soviet light industry hadn't yet gotten around to perfecting. Little things, like Marlboro cigarettes and Levi's jeans and Yves St. Laurent suits, and even Gucci shoes. And for Brezhnev himself, a Ferrari or two. Nothing petrodollars couldn't buy. Superpower pocket change.

There was only one drawback to Brezhnev's Petrodollar Plan: cashing in on the dollar windfall meant sacrificing the Soviet Union's splendid isolation. Not a lot, mind you. A couple of forays into Western trade and finance. A few more Western businessmen visiting Moscow from time to time. The KGB and MVD (Interior Ministry) were well prepared and well equipped, and both knew how to deal with bourgeois tendencies when they spied them. Besides, at this point in the development of the Communist state, greater exposure to capitalist trade seemed to be a necessary evil. Generally, things were coming along nicely. Soviet citizens were enjoying a period of prosperity the likes of which Russians had never known. But there were still some structural problems.

Take agriculture. Stalin's collectives were not performing as promised. The bad years were consistently worse than the good years were good, and the Soviets seemed always to be slaughtering their herds and tightening their belts. Clearly there were kinks in the system, but a good man, like young Gorbachev, the new minister of agriculture, could iron them out. In the meantime, they'd cover current shortfalls with imported American wheat.

And petrodollars could patch up some of the other problem spots. New Western equipment would expand and upgrade their oil fields and refineries, the source of their unexpected wealth. And West German presses and Swedish machine tools and Italian injection molding equipment could modernize Soviet light industry in areas where it had fallen behind: plastics, synthetics, pharmaceuticals, silicon technology, and printed circuits—to name but a few.

So began the dollarization of the Soviet economy, and with the dollars came dollar-based inflation. It started as a trickle, not a flood, so the effects were hardly noticeable at first. Even trained observers could have missed them. Of course, in the Soviet Union at the time, there were very few observers trained in Western economics, and fewer still trained to spot the devious ways that dollarization and imported inflation worked on a fixed-price economy.

As a matter of fact, Western observers themselves were not particularly adept at spotting the problem. Recycling Persian Gulf petrodollars became big business at New

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York banks in the mid-'70s, and billions got "placed" in South American countries with economies very similar in many respects to the Soviets'. Still, the dollarization of the Soviet economy is a special case, due to the arcane nature of Soviet investment and certain peculiarities of the ruble and ruble prices.

Early on the Soviets decided that prices in the Worker's Paradise would be fixed and fixed low. Rising prices are out of place in anyone's picture of paradise, and from the worker's perspective, high prices smack of capitalism. So the fixed prices stayed in place until the state decided to "reform" them, which was infrequent. After piecemeal price reforms under Khrushchev between 1955 and 1963, retail prices went practically untouched again till 1982.

Now, a precondition for fixed prices was non-convertibility. The danger was not that Soviet workers would cash in their rubles and leave the country, because the government wouldn't let them out anyway. Rather, non-convertibility prevented unscrupulous foreign speculators from buying cheap Soviet goods and selling them for big bucks back home. It insulated the Soviet pricing system from international arbitrage, based either on exchange rates or on price dislocations. Ruble convertibility was reserved strictly for Soviet state monopoly transactions.

There is yet another obstacle to ruble convertibility. Under communism, private citizens cannot own the "means of production." You can own a car, but you can't profit by using it: you can't deliver parcels or run a taxi service. To ensure against private ownership of the means of production, the government had to draw a line between what a private citizen's ruble could and could not buy. The line got drawn at the "wholesale" level (*optovaya tsena*). That means that a private citizen's rubles (*nalichnyi*) can buy a hundred pairs of shoes at the retail price, but not at the wholesale price, where they can be resold for a profit. It means *nalichnyi* can buy meat but not cattle, gasoline but not crude oil, yarn but not industrial looms.

Rubles that can buy the cattle, the crude oil, and the looms are called *beznalichnye* (transferable) rubles. These are the rubles on the books of state-owned factories and enterprises. They are used by the government for investment, by state monopoly enterprises in payment of state orders for goods and services at wholesale prices, and by the state bank in the limited cases of convertibility. Dollars earned from Soviet oil exports, for example, are converted to *beznalichnyi*.

So what happened when the Soviets started importing Western, dollar-priced grain into their fixed-price, doubly non-convertible ruble system? They ate it, of course. But as it turned out, they had to eat more than the grain.

Between 1970 and 1980 the Soviets imported hundreds of millions of tons of grain at prevailing world market prices. Now, as everyone knows, hardly a day goes by that grain prices don't change—except in the Soviet Union, of course. The price of basic Soviet bread stayed at twenty kopeks a kilo from 1955 until April this year. Meanwhile, the price of U.S. Number 2 Hard Red Winter Wheat, the stuff the Soviets bought most of, moved from $1.54 a bushel in 1970 to $4.45 in 1980.

How did Soviet bakeries avoid retail price increases while wholesale wheat prices soared? The state budget absorbed the ruble losses. It really didn't make any difference who took the losses, of course. Everyone involved, from the Bank down to the bread shops, was owned by the state, the ultimate and the only Soviet investor. Anyway, the dollars to pay for the wheat were coming from the state's oil export earnings. So where the wheat-related operating expenses exceeded wheat-related revenues, the state provided subsidies out of its fund of petrorubles. By 1985 the state was paying out 54.7 billion rubles in subsidies to agriculture. Not all of that went for import or "translation losses," of course, but they're in there for some of it.

Petrorubles, by the way, were created by converting hard currency oil export earnings into rubles. The conversion mechanism was called a DVK (*Differentsionnyi Valyutnyi Koeffitsient*). DVKs were not exchange rates. They were accounting tools that translated ruble numbers into dollar numbers, and vice versa. They were product specific, and they made no attempt to establish the value of the ruble in dollar terms.

And as Western inflation set in, as Soviet trade with the West expanded, Soviet accountants faced the same "translation" problems more frequently and in more sectors of the economy. Wheat and Guccis are consumer products, of course, and imported consumer products are line items in the Current Account. That means they are expensed in the year in which they are imported. Their value doesn't get amortized over a number of future years, so the translation problem can't screw up the Capital Account. To screw up the Capital Account, the Soviets had to import durable goods: cars and trucks, tubing and valves for pipelines, office copiers, medical equipment, and machine tools. Especially machine tools.

It remains a mystery why the world's largest manufacturer of machine tools found it necessary to import still more machine tools. Marshall Goldman, associate director of Harvard's Russian Research Center, fails to find a reasonable explanation for the practice, calling it a Soviet "fetish." And the numbers bear out his thesis. The USSR imported loads of machinery and machine tools, sometimes entire plants. Whatever the reason for importing them, the machines didn't put a particularly happy face on Soviet bookkeepers or the economy whose books they were keeping.

For example, how did the Soviets amortize the dollar cost of an imported machine over the fixed-price ruble sales of the widgets it made? First, they referred to the ever expanding list of DVKs (at some point there were more than 2,000 different "internal exchange rates" in the Soviet Union) to determine the rate at which the machine's dollar value should be translated into rubles. And, as with wheat, problems arose when the DVKs

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began to diverge from the increasing prices of imported equipment. In the case of machinery, however, someone at the Bank or in the Ministry of Foreign Trade put his foot down and refused to take any more translation losses, especially ones with five-, ten-, or twenty-year tails on them representing the amortization period of the equipment.

That means the DVKs got fixed, and the price increases got passed along to factories where the machines were installed. It doesn't mean the factories passed on incremental increases to the consumer. Ruble retail prices were not raised. As in the case of wheat, the mounting losses at the factories were eventually covered by state subsidies, which would recur automatically every year for as many years as it took to amortize the machines.

That's bad enough, but there's a more troubling issue here. Even when made on Western machines, Soviet widgets couldn't compete on Western markets. Whatever it was—design, packaging, post-sale services, or quality—Soviet products lacked it, and they could never capture a strong market share in the ever more competitive Western markets. Today the Soviets acknowledge that some 85 percent of their products fail to meet minimum Western standards for quality.

How can you amortize hard currency capital expense over ruble-dominated products that, as in the Soviet case, have no hard currency value? The short answer is: you can't. You have to amortize it over whatever's earning the hard currency, like oil. But if that's the case, what do you do to compensate for the hard currency value of the Soviet raw materials, such as oil, used in the manufacture of these valueless (at least, in the hard currency sense) Soviet products?

You're supposed to raise the ruble price of oil to Soviet users. But Goskomtsen couldn't very well do that without raising all prices, wholesale and retail, throughout the entire Soviet pricing system in virtually every sector of the economy, just as inflation was doing in Western economies. And, as even the youngest of Young Pioneers knew, raising prices was capitalist practice. Not at all what Marx had in mind.

Brezhnev clearly erred in not freeing prices and converting the ruble to cope with postwar growth and its primary side effect, worldwide inflation. One of the reasons the Bretton Woods signatories had to abandon the gold standard, and one of the signals inflation was sending the Soviets, was that prices tied to an arbitrarily fixed standard, be it gold or a DVK, put severe constraints on credit formation and inhibited economic growth.

But Brezhnev made another blunder in not directing Soviet industry to follow the Western megatrend toward consumer-oriented products. In Brezhnev's defense, it's probably asking too much of one man to spot a megatrend and restructure an entire national economy to capture its benefits. Of course, that's one of the shortcomings of the Soviet system: central planning relies too much on the decisions of too few.

Whether or not Soviet central planners would have come up with hula hoops and CDs and camcorders is another matter entirely, but the fact remains that there were definite limits to the growth of Soviet domestic markets for the products they continued to manufacture and invest in: gas turbines, earth-moving machines, hydraulic presses, and so on. Soviet industry simply refused to diversify into the broader markets consumer products command. It's no secret that if you discount a PC or a skateboard a couple of dollars, you can probably sell a few thousand more. Sadly, the same results do not obtain for, say, industrial balers.

So Soviet industry hit the wall of limited demand. But slack sales notwithstanding and in some cases with no revenues at all, state factories paid wages. Marx was a little vague on marketing, but he was adamant on employment. It was subsidy time all over again in the great USSR.

Covering Soviet agricultural failures with imported wheat, and indulging a Soviet "fetish" with imported industrial machines, and perpetuating a dead-end heavy industrial policy institutionalized state subsidies throughout the many-faceted Soviet economy. Just about everywhere you looked, you could find some kind of subsidy: big or little, homegrown or imported, Current or Capital Account. Each covered growing operational losses in an industry or some branch of agriculture or trade.

And each was getting temporary finance from petrorubles. There would be no cause for alarm until oil wells ran dry or the price of oil on world markets collapsed. Of course, as fortune would have it, that's exactly what happened: in 1980 the price of oil on world markets stopped advancing and began a prolonged retreat. Crude oil prices made lows for the decade when West Texas Intermediate hit $10 a barrel in 1986 . . . the same year Soviet oil production began inexorably to decline. Volcker, it happens, had broken inflation's back. CPIs, PPIs, and GNP price deflators would continue to rise for some time after 1980, but the commodity-based inflation of the '70s was over. Now all the Soviet subsidy chickens would come home to roost.

Subsidies roost in federal budgets and lay eggs there. When the eggs hatch, they're called federal budget deficits. The difference between Soviet budget deficits and, say, U.S. budget deficits is the way the two governments finance them. The United States finances its colossal budget shortfalls with equally colossal debt issues: U.S. Treasury bills, notes, and bonds, the yields of which are set by the investing public. Seems fair enough, and as long as it works you can't knock it. Besides, it's the capitalist way.

The Kremlin never really issued debt instruments. Initially the Soviets avoided running deficits altogether and ran shortages instead: that is, as long as citizens were content to live with shortages, there was no need to launch the costly government investment programs required to expand production. Then, just when the Soviet public's expectations began to rise and deficits seemed inevitable, the Kremlin found it could finance

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growth and investment with petrorubles—an option the U.S. government, of course, never had.

But then, with oil prices collapsing and wells running dry, with petrorubles running short and with no capitalist debt market back home to turn to, the Soviets were left with no alternative but to monetarize their deficits by printing rubles. Printing rubles, like robbing banks, covers short-term deficits with long-term consequences. The penalty for printing rubles is inflation. So now the Soviet government found itself doing inflation time for printing rubles, and doing any time anywhere earns a bad reputation. In the Soviet Union, where the people couldn't criticize the government, they began bad-mouthing the ruble. The average comrade in the street began to complain, as have his fellow victims of inflation everywhere, "The ruble doesn't buy what it used to anymore."

Just about everywhere you look, inflation has taken a bite out of some currency's buying power. The difference between the ruble and the others is that, in many ways, the dollar and its hard currency cousins buy more than they did, say, ten years ago. Fewer potatoes, perhaps. Less bread and milk and meat, to be sure. But ten years ago the dollar didn't buy a CD player. Or anti-locking brake systems. Or dash-mounted, impact-activated air bags. Or a Nintendo. Or options on Treasury bond futures. The list goes on and on.

Meanwhile the ruble buys less meat and fewer potatoes, and still it can't buy most of the products that have become standard fare in the West. To many Soviet citizens, printing rubles amid widespread shortages of the commonest consumer goods was the Kremlin's way of saying, "Let them eat cake." A more charitable view, perhaps, is that, unable to supply the public with product, the Kremlin decided to give them more rubles instead. Either way, the effects—both psychological and economic—were the same.

Psychological reactions to persistent shortages and sudden ruble inflation varied, but the prevailing attitude is captured succinctly in the most quotable of Soviet quips: "We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us." The attitude problem didn't help Soviet productivity or engender a deeper regard for the ruble or its Kremlin printers. To the contrary, widespread and constant shortages made virtues of greed and avarice and turned absenteeism, cheating, and theft into tools of survival, despite stiff penalties for hoarding and "speculation." Soviet citizens began to wear cynicism like body armor against the slings and arrows of Soviet life. And the armor was heaviest against the state's psychological weapons: the ideals of the revolution, Marxism, Lenin, communism's common good. Exhortations to the greater glory of Soviet labor would henceforth and forever fail. Labor for its own sake was no longer an incentive.

Economically, too, printing rubles got poor marks abroad. Western economists used to credit the Soviet Union with having the world's highest savings rate. However, as foreign economists got a better grip on Soviet economics, that expression fell into disfavor, the credit got quietly withdrawn, and what formerly went for ruble savings now gets referred to disparagingly as the "ruble overhang." Estimates vary, but it seems there are at least 400 billion rubles that Soviet consumers couldn't find anything to spend on. Shortages, of course, are free.

Starved for goods and no longer content to line up for the state's meager rations, Soviet citizens long ago turned to black markets. Prices there were higher, often much higher, but Soviet citizens had plenty of rubles, and there were no lines. The size, diversity, and importance of these markets grew over the years till the mid-'80s, when black markets virtually exploded. Stanislav Shatalin, author of the much ballyhooed "500 Days" plan, estimates that by 1989, annual turnover in the "shadow economy" was one-fifth the size of the entire Soviet GDP, including, one assumes, military expenditures. That means something on the order of 185 billion rubles, and it didn't put a dent in the ruble "overhang." Shatalin points out that, in the food trade sector alone, black markets account for 42 percent of meat and meat products, 75 percent of potatoes, 55 percent of fruits and vegetables, and 20 percent of milk sold to the Soviet public. These are only estimates, of course. There are no official statistics on Soviet black market activity. It goes unrecorded, unregulated, and—perhaps most important for a government strapped with deficits—untaxed.

Soviet black markets played a pre-eminent role in ruble inflation and the collapse of the Soviet economic system. Free of ideological constraints, the black markets allow prices to rise to whatever level needed to secure their supplies, giving expression to inflation in the Western sense: rising prices. But more important, black markets actually convert the ruble internally: i.e., they allow private rubles to buy state orders.

State orders (*goszakazy*) are more akin to military requisition than to market mechanism. The entire Soviet command-administrative system is built around the sanctity of state orders. When rubles carry greater weight than requisition, when penalties get ignored and private rubles buy up state orders, the system begins breaking down. The command-administrative system loses command. That's exactly where things stand today.

Western inflation alone didn't cause Soviet economic ruin. The origins of this failure lie in the byzantine political system the Bolsheviks built on Marx's shaky foundations. Western inflation shook economic structures around the world, and in the Soviet Union the house that communism built fell down. It cannot be rebuilt. The Soviet economic system cannot be remodeled or reformed. Those who shape the Soviet future must take up where Gorbachev left off. Glasnost must be understood and implemented in the widest sense of the word: political and economic openness to the rest of the world. Western inflation's effects on a "closed" Soviet economy prove that no society is truly isolated, that all nations, for better or for worse, are a part of a world economy, and no troops or tanks can change that. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

The Bad Old Days

The French director Claude Berri has had a peculiar career. What's peculiar is that there are some genuinely good items in it. The man who began with such treacle as *Le Poulet* and *The Two of Us* and *The Sex Shop* seemed destined for a successful confectionery life. But *Tchao Pantin* wasn't bad, and the duo of *Jean de Florette* and *Manon of the Spring* was solid—full-blooded old-fashioned films which might easily have slipped into the Berri molasses barrel but that were kept firm.

However, as Heraclitus said, character is fate. With **Uranus** (Prestige) Berri had the chance to make the film of his life; instead, lapsing into earlier extravagance, he hasn't done much more than show us what the film might have been. The subject is postwar France, the place a bombed-out town in the spring of 1945. The screenplay was adapted by Berri and his sister, Arlette Langmann, from a novel by Marcel Aymé (unread by me), a man whose own behavior under the Occupation was not above suspicion and who here treats that very theme: behavior under the Occupation and its after-effects.

Needless to say, it's a complex topic. What it certainly doesn't need is "dramatizing" in the most facile sense. From what I know of Aymé's work, I doubt that it's so treated by him in his novel. The heaviness here shows the vulgar Berri touch of old.

Contrasting kinds of behavior collide in the film: those who resisted the Germans (mostly Communists); those who collaborated out of genuine conviction that fascism was France's salvation; those who collaborated because they didn't care much one way or another and wanted to keep out of trouble. One grim fact the film faces is that, now that the Germans are gone and the French fascists overthrown, the triumphant Communists are behaving much like fascists—controlling jobs, plotting, indicting out of vindictiveness rather than proof.

This grimness is underscored by the one fugitive in the film, certain to be shot if found, a still-convinced French fascist. The film's best element is that Berri sees the irony in this reversal of the wartime situation when anti-fascists were in hiding; and he adds to the irony by using an actor, Gérard Desarthe, who gives the role dignity, conviction, quiet fatalism. (It seems pertinent to note that Berri is Jewish.)

One of the now powerful Communists, played by Michel Blanc, is something of a counterpart, quiet and honest. One of the apoliticals, Jean-Pierre Marielle, is bland and shrugging; another, Philippe Noiret, is ruefully philosophical, enjoying the spectacle of life as it plays out around him. (This is said to have been Aymé's view.) No woman in the film—there are several prominent ones—is given political color of any kind.

The film goes chiefly awry in the way Berri writes the neighborhood café owner and the way he is acted by the prodigiously gifted Gérard Depardieu. The *patron* is shown as a sensual brute who loves poetry and tries to improvise it and as the enemy of one particular Communist fink whom he persecutes throughout the story. (The *patron* wears a faint Hitler mustache.) Depardieu spends about three-quarters of his screen time bullying his enemy or roaring with *élan vital.* He has mountainous presence, but Berri exploits it so shamelessly that he tears the film apart. And there's a protracted death scene for Depardieu that reminded me of Nick Bottom.

But Berri also encourages or allows three older actors to overstep, Marielle, Noiret, and Michel Galabru, who was wondrous as the madman in *The Judge and the Assassin* and is here a wartime profiteer. Each of these men has at least one long speech in which he explains himself to his own satisfaction. Marielle is a shrewd opportunist who talks cynically: money is the only real value, he says. (Yet he behaves humanely: he shelters the fugitive fascist at some personal risk.)

Noiret, a schoolteacher who boards in Marielle's apartment, wends his way from soup in his room to the corner of Depardieu's café that is his temporary schoolroom until the school is rebuilt. His house was bombed during the war, just as he was reading about Uranus in an astronomy series: hence the title's implication that the town, through that bombing, became another planet. (His wife was killed that night because she was with her lover, whose house was flattened.) Now, almost resignedly, he gets

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Hangin' with the Homeboys. *Some keen insight, some humor, much compassion in this seemingly casual but deftly structured account of young blacks and Hispanics. (Reviewed 8/5/91)* **Jungle Fever.** *Spike Lee has already reached the point where a new film of his needs to be seen. His main subject here, an interracial love affair, is less well handled than other matters, but his directing grows. (7/29/91)* **My Father's Glory** *and* **My Mother's Castle.** *Two golden-glow companion features, based on Marcel Pagnol's account of his boyhood in Provence. Even if it couldn't have been as idyllic as this, we're glad he remembered it this way. (7/15&22/91)* **Straight Out of Brooklyn.** *Less dexterous than it might be, this drama of life in a black Brooklyn housing project has force. Written and directed by 19-year-old Matty Rich. (8/5/91)*— **SK**

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pleasure out of the sights and sounds of the day.

Galabru exemplifies *je m'en foutisme.* He tells his son, in their comfy home, that one of the reasons he did what he did during the war was his self-disgust at bringing into the world a son so much like himself.

Under Berri's weak hand, each of these fine artists goes a bit overboard. For a while, we can tell ourselves that these actors, with their excellent voices and love of their language, are taking realism into hyperrealism by concentrating on their own art, making the film an occasion for truth in performance rather than truth in text. But soon it's clear that this is the wrong vehicle for such aesthetic adventure. Their performances simply are a bit fruity. Add Depardieu's rolling around in self-display, and *Uranus* becomes a serious picture, about the mobility of morality, seriously botched.

Another fascist era is the setting of Pupi Avati's **The Story of Boys and Girls** (Aries), Italy in the mid-1930s. With Avati's screenplay, this story—of men and women, actually—concerns a huge luncheon to celebrate an engagement, held in an exquisitely situated farmhouse in the hills near Bologna. This is one of those films in which there is no central action: the picture weaves together ten or twelve stories of people involved in this party.

It's all done well enough, except that only one of the stories has real interest. The family has rented a room in an outbuilding as a weekend place. The tenant is a middle-aged eyeglass salesman from the city, who arrives—coincidentally with the luncheon—with a young French woman. At first, the family is shocked; but the man's taciturn demeanor, his revelation that he has not long to live and that the young woman is cheering his last months, win him at least partial acceptance. He and his friend are invited to join the party for dessert.

Other characters are vividly but for the most part familiarly drawn. One of the relatives at the party is an ardent black-shirted fascist. This is absolutely the only connection between the engagement party and the era. Any political comment (except for some brief unconnected stuff before the credits) is absent. The fascist might as well have been an ardent vegetarian.

One element of the picture is exceptional. Avati and his editor Amedeo Salfa have edited it superbly. It was a difficult job to intertwine the various stories with balance, with just enough time for the clarity of each without letting it drag, and to move the totality of those strands with a general pulse as if the film were a one-stranded story. But all that deftness is used to very small ultimate ends. •

America's silliest world-historical figure.

The Child Monarch

By Hendrik Hertzberg

I.

Maybe the local time just seems slower because the current occupant of the White House is a hyperactive gland case. Anyhow, it's hard to believe that only a couple of years have passed since the Reagans went away. It was a touching moment, we now learn. "Look, honey," Ronnie whispered tenderly to Nancy as the helicopter banked back for one more sweep across the South Lawn, "there's our little shack." That's according to *An American Life.* According to *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime,* he whispered tenderly, "There's our little bungalow down there." Whatever.

It's taken a while for the full weirdness of the Reagan years to sink in. Not that the unnerving facts weren't available; but nobody—not even Reagan's political opponents—really wanted to face them. We've known for some time, for example, that Reagan's schedule was drawn up in consultation with an astrologer. Reagan's sacked chief of staff, Donald T. Regan, told us so in a book published a full eight months before the administration left office. Thanks to Nancy Reagan, Kitty Kelley, and now Lou Cannon, we've since learned about the weekly astrology classes Nancy took during the 1950s and '60s, the "zodiac parties" the Reagans attended in Hollywood, Nancy's annoyance when the White House astrologer insisted on being paid for her horoscopes, and the humiliation felt by aides such as James Baker, Richard Darman, and Michael Deaver at having to explain away absurd and arbitrary changes in the schedule that they knew were being made on the basis of supersecret astrological prognostications.

President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime
by Lou Cannon
(Simon and Schuster, 948 pp., $24.95)

An American Life
by Ronald Reagan
(Simon and Schuster, 748 pp., $24.95)

Cannon finds no evidence that astrology had any direct effects on substantive policy. But he finds plenty of evidence that this was a government of, by, and for the stars. And astrology, as it happens, is a pretty good metaphor for the peculiar qualities of that government and its peculiar central character.

Reagan, as portrayed in Cannon's book and in his own, is a childlike and sometimes childish man. His head is full of stories. He is unable to think analytically. He is ignorant. He has notions about the way things work, but he doesn't notice when these notions contradict each other. He has difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality. He believes fervently in happy endings. He is passive and fatalistic. He cannot admit error.

Within the White House, Reagan himself was consulted precisely as one consults a horoscope. To his frazzled assistants he had mystical power, but was not quite real. Like a soothsayer's chart, he required deciphering. "Reaganology," Cannon writes, "was largely based on whatever gleanings could be obtained from body language." The president's pronouncements in meetings, which usually took the form of anecdotes that might or might not be relevant to the matter at hand, were open to various interpretations. When the conversation ranged beyond the handful of *Animal Farm*-type certainties that made up what Cannon calls Reagan's "core beliefs" (taxes bad, defense good; government bad, markets good) Reagan was lost. Though the people who served with him respected him for his occult powers—his rapport with the television audience, his ability to read a text convincingly, the powerful simplicity of the core beliefs—they viewed his intellect with contempt. They thought he was a big baby, and they were right.

This is a point that Cannon makes over and over, in one way and another. His book is devastating and superb. He

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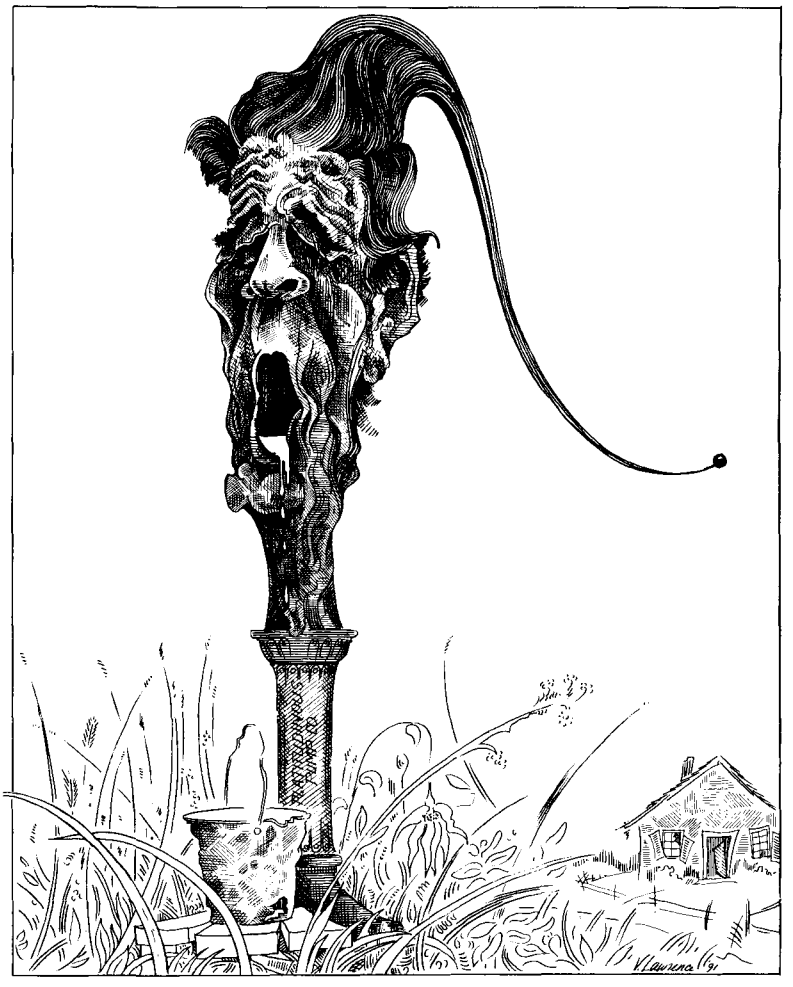
has covered Reagan for twenty-five years and is looked upon by Reagan's friends and enemies alike as a fair witness and an impartial judge. Having read not only Cannon's new blockbuster but also several thousand of his stories and columns in *The Washington Post*, I still have no idea if he is pro-Reagan or anti-Reagan. His only discernible ideological predisposition is that he has no ideological predisposition (though this ideologically predisposes him to underestimate ideology's importance, as well as to be more sympathetic to the administration's "pragmatists" than to its movement conservatives).

Cannon's book braids a biography of Reagan together with a detailed and lively account of Reagan's presidency. Much of it is necessarily about Reagan's advisers and Cabinet secretaries, for it was on them that the day-to-day burdens of the presidency actually fell. A good deal of what Cannon shows us about Reagan is seen through their eyes. It's quite a spectacle:

> The sad, shared secret of the Reagan White House was that no one in the presidential entourage had confidence in the judgment or capacities of the president.
>
> Pragmatists and conservatives alike treated Reagan as if he were a child monarch in need of constant protection.
>
> Reagan's reliance on metaphor and analogy for understanding made him vulnerable to arguments that were short on facts and long on theatrical gimmicks.
>
> He made sense of foreign policy through his long-developed habit of devising dramatic, all-purpose stories with moralistic messages, forceful plots, and well-developed heroes and villains.
>
> The more Reagan repeated a story, the more he believed it and the more he resisted information that undermined its premises.
>
> Ronald Reagan's subordinates often despaired of him because he seemed to inhabit a fantasy world where cinematic events competed for attention with reality.

And so on. Cannon stresses the movie angle as a way of understanding Reagan, which is interesting in light of how little public discussion of this angle there was during Reagan's twenty-five years as an active politician. Governor Pat Brown of California, whom Reagan unseated in his first bid for public office in 1966, humorously likened him to John Wilkes Booth. The joke backfired, but the "actor issue" was a perfectly legitimate one. If it is fair to examine how a candidate's background as a soldier or a corporate lawyer or a civil rights agitator might affect his habits of mind, then surely it was fair to ask if the mental habits instilled by spending most of



RONALD REAGAN BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

one's time until the age of 53 dressing up in costumes and playing out elaborately mounted wish-fulfillment fantasies was good preparation for high office. But partly because it hadn't worked for Brown and partly because mentioning Reagan's profession somehow got classified as bigotry ("jobism," it might be called nowadays), the actor issue was never aired in any of Reagan's subsequent campaigns.

As president, Reagan spent a lot of time at the movies. According to Cannon, he saw some 350 feature films at Camp David alone. He also saw several more a month at the White House family theater, plus an unknown number in the private screening rooms of rich friends. And those were just the ones requiring the services of a projectionist. In addition, the Reagans watched TV every night they were free. Reagan loved war pictures. He had starred in several during World War II (*International Squadron*, *Rear Gunner*, and *For God and Country*, among others) and had absorbed hundreds more. Some of his best anecdotes—the B-17 pilot who cradles his wounded gunner's head in his arms as they ride their crippled plane down together; the black sailor who saves his white shipmates by grabbing a machine gun and swiveling to shoot a Japanese fighter out of the sky; the American Army officer (Reagan himself) who helps liberate the death camps—were twisted, hoked-up, or falsified versions of experiences that Reagan had encountered in movie theaters, not in real life.

We knew about Reagan and war movies. What Cannon adds is that Reagan loved peace movies, too. He couldn't stop talking about *War Games*, a Matthew Broderick vehicle about a teenage hacker who breaks into the NORAD computer and saves the world from being destroyed by trigger-happy Pentagon generals. He watched *The Day After*, the 1983 made-for-TV nuclear holocaust weepie that his own people spent weeks trying to discredit, and found it powerful and affecting. His strategic defense proposal was strikingly reminiscent of one of his own movies, *Murder in the Air* (1940), in which the future president, playing Secret Service agent Brass Bancroft, foils a foreign plot to steal the "Inertia Projector," an American ray gun that can shoot down distant enemy aircraft. And according to Colin Powell, Reagan's last national security adviser, Reagan's proposal to share strategic defense technology with the Soviets was inspired by *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, a gripping 1951 science fiction movie in which a flying saucer descends on Washington. The saucer disgorges Michael Rennie, the urbane representative of an advanced civilization, who

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warns earthlings to put aside their petty quarrels among themselves or face the consequences.

If the war-movie side of Reagan had been all there was to him, as many of us feared in the early 1980s, all of us might now be radioactive ash. But because he also had his peace-movie side, he turned out to be a somewhat less predictable and altogether less frightening character. He was, in fact, a precursor, a kind of spiritual grandfather, of what has become a standard Hollywood type: the autodidactic, self-righteous, "issue-oriented" star who is full of opinions about politics and who also dabbles in, and is fascinated by, "New Age" phenomena. These last, in Reagan's case, include (besides astrology) extrasensory perception, precognition, sci-fi, people from other planets, and prophecies about Armageddon. It was only natural for him to be interested in such things, given that the Reagans spent most of their lives (as Nancy puts it with screwball reasonableness in *My Turn*) "in the company of show-business people, where superstitions and other non-scientific beliefs are widespread and commonly accepted."

Reagan's staff kept most of the wigginess from spilling over into the public arena. "Here come the little green men again," Powell used to tell his staff whenever the subject arose of Reagan's preoccupation with how an alien invasion would unify the earth. Powell, Cannon writes dryly, "struggled diligently to keep interplanetary references out of Reagan's speeches." They couldn't be kept out of informal conversations, though—much to the bafflement of Mikhail Gorbachev, who, when Reagan started in about invasions from outer space at the 1985 summit in Geneva, politely changed the subject.

The wildest aspect of Reagan's premature New Agery was his obsession with the Battle of Armageddon. The closest anyone ever came to flushing out this particular bit of Reaganuttiness came during the second televised campaign debate in 1984, when Marvin Kalb asked Reagan if the matter of Armageddon had had any effect on American nuclear planning. Reagan just made it through his answer safely, saying that while he had engaged in "philosophical discussions" on the subject, "no one knows" whether "Armageddon is a thousand years away or the day after tomorrow," and therefore he had never "said we must plan according to Armageddon."

Had Walter Mondale picked up on this opening and used the rest of the debate, and maybe the rest of the campaign, to harass Reagan on what could have become the "Armageddon issue," the election might have been less one-sided. A little more drilling in Armageddon territory could have yielded a political gusher. Cannon has conducted his own archaeological dig into the matter and unearthed enough shards to warrant the conclusion that "Reagan is hooked on Armageddon." In 1968 Billy Graham visits Reagan and they talk about portents of the end of days. In 1970 Pat Boone brings a couple of radio evangelists to see Reagan in Sacramento, and one of them, seized by a supposed visitation of the Holy Spirit, prophesies rapturously that Reagan will be president and tells him about the approaching mother of all battles, and then listens as Reagan ticks off modern events, such as the founding of the State of Israel, that seem to fulfill the biblical preconditions for the big one. In 1971 Reagan tells his dinner partner, the president pro tem of the California Senate, that the end is nigh and that one of the portents is that Libya has gone Communist. In 1980 Reagan announces on Jim Bakker's TV show that "we may be the generation that sees Armageddon."

The obsession continues after Reagan is president. His national security aides grow used to hearing him talk about it. Robert McFarlane becomes convinced, in Cannon's words, "that Reagan's interest in anti-missile defense was the product of his interest in Armageddon." When Frank Carlucci tries to persuade Reagan that nuclear deterrence is a good thing, Reagan astonishes Carlucci by telling him about Armageddon. When Caspar Weinberger tries to make the same case, Reagan gives him the same Armageddon lecture. On March 28, 1987, at the Gridiron Club dinner, Reagan tells James McCartney of Knight-Ridder that because Chernobyl is the Ukrainian word for "wormwood" and Wormwood is the name of a flaming star in the Book of Revelation, the accident at the Soviet nuclear plant was a harbinger of Armageddon. (In a hilarious footnote, Cannon adds that Reagan, in telling the story to McCartney, misremembered the name of the star and called it "Wedgewood." Shades of Nancy's china!) On May 5, 1989, Reagan tells Cannon that Israel's possession of the Temple Mount is a sign that Armageddon looms. There are other omens, too, he tells Cannon. What, for example? "Strange weather things."

II.

The book titled *An American Life* omits any mention of strange weather things. It is as much a star autobiography as a presidential memoir, but star autobiography of the pre-Geraldo type. There are no shocking confessions, no harrowing addictions, no twelve-step recoveries. This is *Photoplay* circa 1940, not *National Enquirer* circa 1990.

Has Reagan read this book? Besides the printed tome, there is also an audio version—two cassettes with a total running time of 180 minutes, on which Reagan, in his seductive announcer's voice, recites excerpts aloud. According to my calculation, the tapes represent about 32,000 of the roughly 260,000 words in the printed text. The evidence, then, is that Reagan has read at least 12 percent of his book. Trust, but verify.

The actual author of *An American Life*, as the opening acknowledgments more or less proclaim, is a "thoroughly professional team" of about two dozen people headed by Robert Lindsey, who has written several readable best-sellers. "Even though I am glad to have this book finished, I will miss my conversations with Bob," writes Reagan, or writes Bob, or writes somebody. There's no way, really, to be sure. Anyway, the conversations with Bob didn't yield much. Almost everything in the book could have been gleaned, perhaps was gleaned, from the public record—from newspapers, old speech and interview transcripts, other books, and White House news releases.

But if there are no revelations, there is

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a portrait—no, there are two portraits. On the surface is the golden personification of the American dream: the small-town lifeguard who saved seventy-seven people from drowning, the movie star who saved the girl and the day in many a B picture, the citizen-politician who saved the conservative movement from sullen irrelevance, the triumphal president who saved his country from drift and decline. Below the surface—but only a little below, since these depths are not very deep—is the child monarch, a person of stunning narcissism and unreflectiveness.

Reagan, as all the world knows, is a big-picture man. His famous "hands-off management style" seems to have evolved early and to have extended to the smallest details of his own life. His most politically potent qualities—the placidity of his temperament, the smooth-surfaced simplicity of his politics, the magical ease with which he waves away inconsistency and irresponsibility—are all related, first, to his ability to ignore contradictions (more precisely, his inability to notice them), and, second, to the effortlessness that has attended all his achievements.

"I was raised to believe that God has a plan for everyone and that seemingly random twists of fate are all a part of His plan," he writes. "My mother—a small woman with auburn hair and a sense of optimism that ran as deep as the cosmos—told me everything in life happened for a purpose. She said all things were part of God's Plan, even the most disheartening setbacks, and in the end, everything worked out for the best." But then, a few sentences later, he tells us what his father taught him: "that individuals determine their own destiny; that is, it's largely their own ambition and hard work that determine their fate in life."

Reagan is untroubled by the stark incompatibility of these two conceptions of will and destiny. He just forges blithely ahead, and before long it becomes clear which of the two views he finds more congenial:

> Then one of those series of small events began that make you wonder about God's Plan.
>
> Once again fate intervened—as if God was carrying out His plan with my name on it.
>
> Then one of those things happened that makes one wonder about God's having a plan for all of us.
>
> If ever God gave me evidence that He had a plan for me, it was the night He brought Nancy into my life.

And finally, as he and his wife emerge from the elevator on the second floor of the White House on the evening of the inaugural:

> I think it was only then, as Nancy and I walked hand in hand down the great Central Hall, that it hit home that I was president . . . it was only at this moment that I appreciated the enormity of what had happened to me.

Even the presidency was something that happened to Reagan. This is more than just the affectation of a becoming modesty. The political philosophy that Reagan adopted in his 40s may have stressed ambition and hard work, but Reagan himself has never had to do much more than go with the Plan. Even in his own telling, it is striking how easy he has had it (which makes his denunciations of "giveaway welfare programs" especially unattractive).

After graduating from Eureka College in 1932, he tells us, he was bitterly disappointed when someone else beat him out for a job running the sporting goods department at the local Montgomery Ward in Dixon, Illinois, for $12.50 a week. That's about it as far as reversals go. A few months later he was making $25 a week as a radio announcer, and then $75, and then, after a quick screen test taken during a trip to California to cover the Chicago Cubs in spring training for his radio station in 1937, $200 a week as a contract player at Warner's—the equivalent today, after taxes, of well over $100,000 a year.

Reagan was 26 when he arrived in Hollywood in the depths of the Depression, and after that it was just a matter of adding zeroes to his income. Even World War II was easy for him. Lieutenant Reagan spent it narrating training films for the Army Air Force at a movie studio in Culver City. His first picture after his discharge involved riding horses, which made it, he writes, "like a welcome-home gift." Of course, he was already home. He had been home all along—though he genuinely believed, at the time and after, that he had been to war.

In 1954, after Reagan's movie career had begun to falter, the Plan intervened in the form of an offer to serve as the host of a television series, "General Electric Theater," and to give speeches at GE plants as a company spokesman. Taking this job, perhaps more than any other decision Reagan ever made, was what made him president. Reagan had turned down other TV offers because, as he notes shrewdly in *An American Life*, "most television series expired after two or three years, and from then on, audiences—and producers—tended to think of you only as the character you'd played in the TV series." Being the host, however, was different. It put him before the public every week for eight years (plus another two years as the host of "Death Valley Days"), not as a cowpoke or a private eye or a bumbling husband, but as a congenial, dignified man in a business suit called Ronald Reagan.

Cannon's book stresses Reagan's pride in his acting and his movie career, but Reagan's book confirms Christopher Matthews's insight that Reagan's real calling in life was not as an actor but as an announcer—and, by extension, as a giver of speeches. Reagan offers no reflections on the craft of acting, but plenty on the craft of announcing and speechmaking. (Can you picture the young Reagan waiting on tables for a chance to play Hamlet? Neither can I.) The speeches for GE became The Speech, a compendium of free enterprise bromides and fabulous anecdotes about government waste that he polished to a high gloss in hundreds of repetitions, and which, when he delivered it on national television in 1964 on behalf of Barry Goldwater, led to the governorship of California and eventually the presidency of the United States.

III.

Characteristically, Reagan sees no contradiction between the cozy cartel system of the Hollywood studios in which he prospered and the cutthroat laissez-faire doctrine he would later espouse. On the contrary, he deplores the antitrust suit that forced producers "to make movies purely on the speculation theaters would want to show them." This kind of ideological incoherence contributes to Reagan's opacity about just when and how he became a conservative. His wife is more straightforward on this point. Referring to Reagan's years shilling for GE in the middle and late 1950s, she wrote in *My Turn*: "It was during this period that Ronnie gradually changed his political views."

From Nancy's account, and from Cannon's, it seems clear that during his GE spokesman days Reagan became persuaded by the sound of his own voice, which was also his master's. More flatteringly to himself, Reagan depicts the change as starting much earlier. He pretends to recall, anachronistically, that as a small-town boy he learned "to know people as individuals, not as blocs or members of special interest groups." He claims, improbably, that his support for Franklin D. Roosevelt was a function of FDR's call in 1932 for a cut in federal spending. While making a picture in England in 1949 he observes, omnisciently, "how the welfare state sapped

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ncentive to work from many people in a wonderful and dynamic country." He makes much of having called on the Democrats to nominate Dwight D. Eisenhower for president, but this was a popular position within Americans for Democratic Action, the leading liberal pressure group of the day. (The ADA ticket was Ike and William O. Douglas.)

Reagan also portrays his battles with Hollywood Communists in the Screen Actors Guild, the United World Federalists, the American Veterans Committee, and other organizations as a factor in his conversion to conservative Republicanism. This makes a nice, heroic-sounding story, but it's demonstrably untrue. He writes that "after the war, I'd shared the orthodox liberal view that Communists—if there really *were* any—were liberals who were temporarily off track, and whatever they were, they didn't pose much of a threat to me or anyone." But this was *not* the "orthodox," i.e., mainstream, liberal view. By 1946, and unmistakably by 1950, the great majority of American liberals, leftists, and Democrats were firmly anti-Communist. This was the case even in Hollywood, where a fair amount of poolside Stalinism (like today's hot-tub Sandinismo) persisted right through the mid-1950s.

Reagan after the war was a dupe, an enthusiastic joiner of Communist front groups. He expresses no remorse about this. On the contrary, in his memoir you can almost hear the fond, indulgent chuckle in his voice as he describes himself during this period. He "was speaking out against the rise of neofascism in America." He "joined just about any organization I could find that guaranteed to save the world." But heck, he just "hadn't given much thought to the threat of communism." Darn that headstrong, idealistic Reagan kid anyway—somebody forgot to tell him about the Moscow trials. In any case, he doesn't mention such things in explaining his awakening to the problem of communism. Instead he recounts a visit from a couple of FBI agents and his agreement to become an informer for them. ("They asked if they could meet with me periodically to discuss some of the things that were going on in Hollywood. I said of course they could.")

Whatever his reasons for turning against communism, he remained left of center long after he did so. As late as 1952, by which date he had been publicly denouncing Communists for six years, the Los Angeles County Democratic Central Committee declined to endorse him for an open House seat because they thought he was *too* liberal. It's tantalizing to speculate on what might have been had the Democrats of Los Angeles not made this bonehead decision. Would Representative Reagan have become Senator Reagan? Might he have ended up as JFK's running mate? Would he have drifted to the right and become a marginal crank like Sam Yorty? Or would he have stayed left and won the White House four or eight years earlier than he did? And—most delicious thought of all—would the ultimate sneer-word of today's conservatives be not McGovernism or Carterism, but Reaganism?

The fact that Reagan converted to anti-communism long before he converted to conservatism may have had an important consequence. Evil though he thought the empire was, his conservatism did not depend on an emotional attachment to a permanent, Manichaean East-West struggle. This may be one reason why he was so much readier than were the ideologues among his aides when Gorbachev came along and announced that the struggle was over.

Reagan is not, nor has he ever been, ideologically sophisticated. He was a sentimental liberal who became a sentimental conservative. His liberalism was a product of inertia combined with a vague sympathy for the little guy; his conservatism was a product of convenience combined with sympathy for guys who weren't so little—the GE managers and executives who had his ear for eight years. ("By 1960, I realized the real enemy wasn't big business, it was big government.") This lack of intellectual sophistication—an inability to think, really—is one of the themes of Cannon's book that manifests itself over and over again in Reagan's book. For example, when he becomes governor of California, two years after the Watts riots, Reagan decides to "find out what was going on" by paying secret visits to black families around the state:

> One of the first things I heard was a complaint that blacks weren't being given a fair shot at jobs in state government. I looked into it and confirmed that virtually the only blacks employed by the state were janitors or those working in other menial positions, largely because state civil service tests were slanted against them.

His response was to change "the testing and job evaluation procedures" to make up for the fact that "blacks just hadn't had the opportunity to get the same kind of schooling as other Californians"—in other words, to rewrite the tests and the qualifications so as to guarantee equality of outcome. A good-hearted act, no doubt about it; but Reagan shows absolutely no awareness that this aggressive instance of affirmative action is precisely the sort of thing that his Justice Department would soon enough denounce as an affront to American values.

Another example. A lodestar of the Reagan administration's foreign policy was the distinction between authoritarian regimes, which are by nature reformable because they permit competing centers of social power to exist, and totalitarian regimes, which are by nature unreformable because all power has been seized, or is in the process of being seized, by a party-state professing a messianic ideology that claims a total monopoly on truth. This analysis was the heart of a famous article by Jeane Kirkpatrick in *Commentary* in 1980. Reagan was so impressed by this piece that he made Kirkpatrick his ambassador to the United Nations.

The doctrine of the immutability of totalitarian regimes has turned out to have no predictive power, and it was therefore a poor basis for long-term policy; but the analytic distinction between the two types of dictatorship was sound enough. The idea that there's a difference between plain old undemocratic governments, however brutal, and those with totalitarian pretensions is not hard to grasp. Furthermore, this idea underlay some of the Reagan administration's

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most important foreign policy innovations. Even so, it comes as no real surprise that the authoritarian-totalitarian distinction was utterly lost on Reagan. Discussing policy options for the hemisphere in *An American Life*, he writes:

> Sure, we could send in the troops, but the threat of communism wouldn't diminish until the people's standard of living was improved and the totalitarian countries of Latin America gave them more freedom.

Discussing the Falklands War, he writes:

> Margaret Thatcher, I think, had no choice but to stand up to the generals who cynically squandered the lives of young Argentineans solely to prolong the life of a corrupt and iron-fisted totalitarian government.

The Argentine military junta, remember, was Kirkpatrick's beau ideal of authoritarian government. And the totalitarian prototype in the Kirkpatrick scheme was pre-Gorbachevian Soviet communism, which Reagan describes as a system of—what else?—"authoritarian rule."

Or perhaps it isn't Reagan but his "thoroughly professional team" that is confused. I must acknowledge that the sentences quoted above are not recited on the cassettes, so there is no hard proof that Reagan was ever familiar with them. But *An American Life* does have passages that Reagan can be credited not only with having read, but with having written. These are excerpts from a diary that he seems to have kept as president, of which a total of about forty pages are scattered through the ghosted text.

To appreciate fully the flavor of these diary entries, one needs to sample more than one or two. The three entries below are given in their entirety. They are typical. I categorically deny that I am being unfair:

> *Feb. 22*
> Lunch on issues. I'm convinced of the need to address the people on our budget and the economy. The press has done a job on us and the polls show its effect. The people are confused about economic program. They've been told it has failed and it has just started.
>
> *June 30*
> Word came that the hostages were going to leave in a Red Cross motorcade for Damascus. It was a long ride. We then were told that celebrations in small villages along their route were delaying them. About a quarter to three our time, they arrived at the Sheraton hotel in Damascus.
>
> Out to George Shultz's home for dinner with George and O'Bie. A very nice and finally relaxed dinner. Before that, however, I spoke to the nation on TV from the Oval Office, then George took questions in the press room. When I spoke our people were just leaving Syrian air space in a military aircraft.
>
> *Sept. 26*
> High spot was swearing in of Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justice Scalia in the East Room. After lunch meeting with George S., Cap W., and Bill Casey plus our White House people, Don R., John P., etc. It was a sum up of where we stand in the negotiations between George and Shevardnadze. The difference between us is their desire to make it look like a trade for Daniloff and their spy Zakharov. We'll trade Zakharov but for Soviet dissidents. We settled on our bottom line points beyond which we won't budge. Then we picked up Nancy and helicoptered to Ft. Meade for the opening of the new National Security Agency complex. I spoke to the NSA employees. Then we helicoptered to Camp David and topped the day with a swim.

The entries from the diary that were chosen for publication in *An American Life* are presumably the best of the lot, and this is as good as they get. One can imagine the sick disappointment of Lindsey and the rest of the team when they got their first look at them. There are no portraits of friends and enemies, no thumbnail sketches, no gossip, no peeves, no wisecracks, no outbursts of principle, no anecdotes—no nothing, really, except simpleminded digests of news bulletins and appointment logs. For authenticity's sake, the team has left in a few grammatical howlers and preserved a Reagan habit, which some will find endearing, of taking the hyphens out of compound phrases like "tight rope," "plane side," and "heart breaking" and saving them up for use in low-octane swear words, such as "h--l" and "d--m" (hang on, shouldn't that be "d–m–"?).

Many entries combine childish diction with childish thinking, as in this reflection on the flap over the visit to the Waffen SS cemetery at Bitburg, Germany:

> I still think we were right. Yes. The German soldiers were the enemy and part of the whole Nazi hate era. But we won and we killed those soldiers. What is wrong with saying, "Let's never be enemies again"? Would Helmut be wrong if he visited Arlington Cemetery on one of his U.S. visits?

And then this follow-up, after Kohl suggested that they balance the Bitburg ceremony with a tour of Dachau:

> Helmut may very well have solved our problem re the Holocaust.

And then there is this innocuous reference to a negotiation on the budget:

> The big thing today was a meeting with Tip, Howard Bohling, Jim Wright, Jim Baker, Ed Meese, Don Regan, and Dave Stockman.

The problem is that Howard Bohling wasn't at the meeting, or on the planet. Our diarist is conflating two of the actual attendees, Howard Baker and Richard Bolling. Are the identities of these men a mere detail? You could say that about Bolling, a mere representative (though a prominent one) and a Democrat to boot. But Senator (and Majority Leader) Baker was the second-most-powerful figure in the Republican Party. He would later become Reagan's chief of staff. It is deeply weird that the president was so vague about who he was.

The emptiness of Reagan's diary is one of many indications that the president's narcissism was of the babyish, not the Byronic, variety. And a happy baby he was. His perfect obliviousness to the feelings and the thoughts of others protected him from emotional turmoil. And his emotional tranquillity in turn helped to cushion him from what otherwise might have been the political impact of the contrast between his beliefs and his life. He listed "family" first among his public values, yet his emotional remoteness so wounded his own children that during the White House years three of them published books attacking him. And he treated his closest aides, Cannon tells us, "as indifferently as he did his children." Once they left his employ, they would never hear from him again.

There were times when Reagan's lack of self-awareness was merely goofy. At other times, however, his inability to see himself clearly takes on a somewhat more unpleasant edge. Consider this anecdote:

> I've never liked hunting, simply killing an animal for the pleasure of it, but I have always enjoyed and collected unusual guns; I love target shooting, and have always kept a gun for protection at home. As I had done when I was governor, I sometimes did some target shooting with the Secret Service agents who accompanied us to the ranch, and occasionally managed to amaze them with my marksmanship. We have a small pond on the ranch that sometimes attracts small black snakes, and every now and then, one would stick its head up out of the water for a second or two. After I'd see one, I'd go into the house and come back with a .38 revolver, go into a little crouch, and wait for the next snake to rise up. Then I'd shoot.
>
> Well, since I was thirty feet or more from the lake, the Secret Service agents were shocked that I was able to hit the snake every time. They'd shake their heads and say to each other, "How the hell does he do it?"
>
> What they didn't know was that my pistol was loaded with shells containing bird shot—like a shotgun—instead of a conventional slug. I kept my secret for a while, but finally decided to fess up and tell them about the bird shot.

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This little story has a chilling, brightly lit creepiness, like something out of David Lynch. Its trajectory, from Reagan's pious and no doubt sincere disavowal of killing animals for pleasure to his almost sensuous description of the fun of blowing the heads off inoffending water snakes (and doing it in an unsporting manner, too), suggests an obliviousness that is potentially sinister. One begins to suspect that, for all his generic charm, Reagan may not be such a nice guy after all. We are dealing here with the same insensibility that enables Reagan to believe that he never traded arms for hostages, that the deficit was all the Democrats' fault, that his economic policies helped the poor at the expense of the rich.

IV.

But wait. If he was dumb, superstitious, childish, inattentive, passive, narcissistic, and oblivious, how come he won the cold war?

Good question. The answer, in two words, is Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan, always lucky, was never luckier than to find himself president of the United States at just the moment when a Soviet leader decided to lift the pall of fear and lies from his empire, thus permitting the system's accumulated absurdities and contradictions to come into plain view and to shake it to pieces.

Everyone agrees that the West, led by the United States, deserves credit for creating the conditions under which this could happen. But in order to assign to Ronald Reagan the lion's share—that is, to assign to this particular president more than the equal slice of credit that is due each of the eight postwar presidents who carried out the Western policies of containment, nuclear deterrence, conventional military readiness, support for NATO, support for non-Communist economic development, and political and diplomatic opposition to Soviet expansionism—you have to believe that the *marginal* differences between Reagan's policies and his predecessors' were the ones that brought about the Gorbachev breakthrough.

Those marginal differences included bigger increases in military spending; intransigence in, if not outright hostility to, arms control negotiations; an emphasis on ideological attacks on Leninism in American public diplomacy; suspension of the anti-Soviet grain embargo; assistance to the guerrillas fighting the Soviet-supported Sandinista regime in Nicaragua; a somewhat more aggressive program of military aid to the Afghani *mujaheddin* than might otherwise have been pursued (though this program was begun under the Democrats and was popular with both parties); the antimissile defense proposal; and the military interventions in Lebanon and Grenada. The effect, such as it was, of these policies on changes within the Soviet Union was probably mixed.

Reagan's admirers argue that the American military buildup encouraged Soviet reform by persuading Gorbachev that the arms race was a pointless rathole. Still, it could also be argued that the buildup retarded reform by strengthening the worst-case paranoids within the Soviet military. More plausible than either argument is the view that Gorbachev's determination to disengage from the cold war was the product of forces far deeper and stronger than whether American military spending increased a lot or a little during the early 1980s, that the forces that made and unmade Gorbachev were indigenous, historical, Russian.

Nor were the other Reagan policy innovations—whether "hawkish" like the contra obsession or "dovish" like the grain-embargo cancellation, whether wise like the president's vigorous rhetorical opposition to Leninist ideology or foolish like the Lebanon fiasco—truly central to the epochal decisions being made in the Kremlin. And the argument that these innovations were decisive requires us to believe that without them Gorbachev would not have come to power; or that he would have come to power, but would not have embarked on the path of glasnost and perestroika; or that he would have embarked on this path, but would have been deflected or replaced long before he could follow it as far as he did. None of these propositions seems plausible to me.

The issue of nuclear weapons increasingly occupied Reagan's attention, and it presents a special case. How much he knew about the topic was the subject of much speculation while he was in office. Cannon shows that Reagan's ignorance was actually more comprehensive than many of us suspected. The president did not know that submarines carried nuclear missiles, or that bombers carried them. He did not know that land-based ballistic missiles made up a much larger proportion of the Soviet nuclear force than the American one, and therefore he did not realize that his proposal for halving the numbers of such missiles on both sides was far from being the even-handed basis for serious negotiation he believed it to be. Though he had campaigned against the "window of vulnerability"—the alleged ease with which a Soviet first strike could destroy America's

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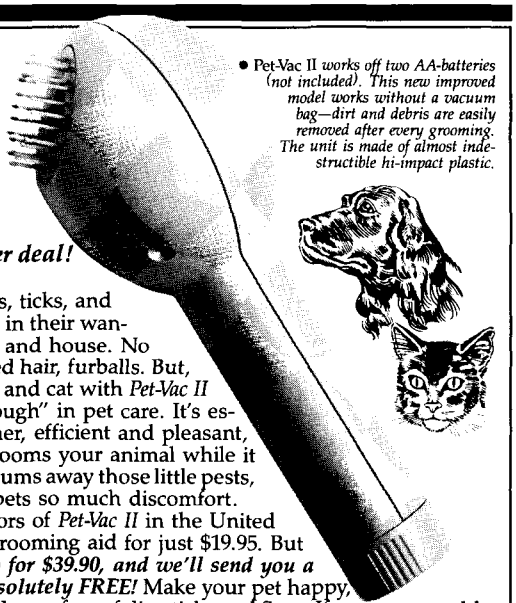

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land-based missiles—he did not know that his own plan to put such missiles in stationary silos would open the "window" wider.

Throughout Reagan's first term his strings were being pulled by officials who privately opposed the whole idea of arms control agreements with the Soviet Union because they thought such agreements weakened the West's will to resist. These officials concocted bargaining positions that the Soviets could be relied upon to reject, which is exactly what the Soviets did under Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko. Then along came Gorbachev. He wanted a deal so badly that he systematically probed until he found a question Washington was unable not to take yes for an answer to. And so the "zero option" for European-based intermediate-range missiles—a proposal that the Defense Department had crafted to be unacceptable—became, presto chango, the great and crowning achievement of Ronald Reagan's foreign policy.

Whatever happens in the aftermath of the coup in Moscow, the central achievements of the Gorbachev years—the dissolution of the Soviet Union's Eastern European empire, the demolition of Leninist ideology, and the defusing of East-West confrontation—will almost certainly remain. Could Gorbachev have done all this without Reagan? Probably, yes—but he probably couldn't have done it without accepting Reagan's (that is, the West's) view of the cold war. Gorbachev recognized that the cause of the cold war was not superpower tensions or capitalist encirclement or the arms race, let alone the international class struggle. The cause of the cold war was simply the Soviet Union's refusal to become a "normal" country. As a corollary, Gorbachev recognized that the Soviet Union faced no military threat from the West, however bulging Western arsenals might be. So he knew he could accept what his predecessors would have seen as preposterously disadvantageous arms control deals without putting his country's physical security at risk.

There was another point of agreement between Gorbachev and Reagan. They both thought Gorbachev's country was redeemable. Reagan had a recurring daydream that someday he would take a Soviet leader up in his helicopter and together they would fly low over an American suburb. The Soviet leader would see the tidy little houses of American workers, with their plastic pools out back and a car or two out front, and he would decide that maybe it was time to scrap communism and try a little democracy and free enterprise instead. Is this sentimental fantasy really so different from what actually happened?

When Reagan called the Soviet Union an "evil empire" and "the focus of evil in the modern world," conservative op-ed writers expressed their satisfaction that at last we had a president who had a moral vocabulary and a tragic sense of history, a president who recognized that some political systems are irredeemably tyrannical and aggressive, a president who rejected the contemptible claptrap that attributes every international conflict to "lack of understanding." These commentators, and many of their friends inside the Reagan administration, saw Gorbachev as simply cleverer than his predecessors, and therefore more dangerous. Reagan did not agree. When he said "evil," he just meant bad. He didn't really believe in immutable malevolence. The villains of Reagan's world were like the ones in Frank Capra's movies: capable of change once they saw the light. Reagan thought that Gorbachev was a pretty good guy.

As president, of course, Reagan was the ex officio high priest of the nuclear cult. He was followed everywhere he went by a military aide handcuffed to the "football," the sacred object containing the codes that would enable him to launch the final conflagration. And the propinquity of the thermonuclear Excalibur gave him, in this one area of policy, a consciousness of personal power unparalleled in history and shared only with his Soviet counterpart. By the same token, the rituals of nuclear summitry required his personal participation, and he found the drama irresistible.

Resplendent in the vestments of the nuclear episcopate, Reagan announced his astonishing heresies. In 1983, just when the whole of the conservative foreign policy establishment, and many centrist and liberal nuclear worthies besides, had geared up to defend the morality of nuclear deterrence against freezeniks, Catholic moralists, Euro-accommodationists, and other unsound elements, the president proclaimed that nuclear deterrence was ... immoral. To replace it, he proposed an exotic space shield that would protect America (and why not Russia, too?) against nuclear attack.

Whatever progress is ultimately made in anti-missile defense technology, the idea of an impenetrable space shield was then, and remains today, a lunatic notion. The notion's provenance was lunatic, too. "The dream," writes Cannon, "was the product of Reagan's imagination, perhaps of Brass Bancroft and the Inertia Projector and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and certainly of the vivid prophecy of Armageddon that Reagan accepted as a valid forecast of the nuclear age." SDI was pure Reagan.

Useless as SDI would be as a shield against a determined missile attack, it would not be at all useless as a supplement to a first strike launched by the side that possessed it. This—plus a superstitious awe of American technology—was why SDI alarmed the Russians. Reagan did not understand this. He thought they were lying when they said they were worried about Americans attacking them with nuclear weapons, because they had to know Americans would never do such a thing. McFarlane, who didn't think they were lying, saw how the dross of Reagan's "dream" could be turned into gold. In a negotiating ploy so one-sided that he privately called it "The Sting," the United States would abandon SDI—a research program of dubious practicability—in exchange for the destruction of thousands of actually existing Soviet nuclear weapons. McFarlane didn't mind that Reagan kept saying SDI was not a bargaining chip, because every such avowal drove up its value as a bargaining chip.

McFarlane didn't realize that the old boy meant what he said. And Reagan had another dream, which prompted him to utter another heresy, the most dangerous one that the priesthood could imagine. He said he wanted to rid the world of nuclear weapons altogether. Total nuclear disarmament was a silly old chestnut of cold war propaganda, especially Soviet propaganda. But Reagan believed in it. He had said so in a number of speeches before he became president, but no one paid any attention because everyone assumed that it was just drivel that he'd thrown in to soften his right-wing image. As president, Reagan continued to believe in the desirability of complete nuclear disarmament, even after it was explained to him that nuclear weapons were good because they had kept the peace for forty years. His advisers, he writes in *An American Life*, included "people at the Pentagon who claimed a nuclear war was 'winnable.' I thought they were crazy."

Reagan knew that his own secretary of defense, for example, was "strongly against" nuclear disarmament. Still, he told Gorbachev that he wanted exactly that. In October 1986, at the Reykjavik summit, the principals agreed on principles: the Soviet Union and the United States would scrap all their ballistic missiles within five years and all the rest of their nukes within ten. The only thing that stood in the way of the deal was SDI. Gorbachev wanted it confined to the laboratory, and he simply refused to take seriously Reagan's offer to share it. Rea-

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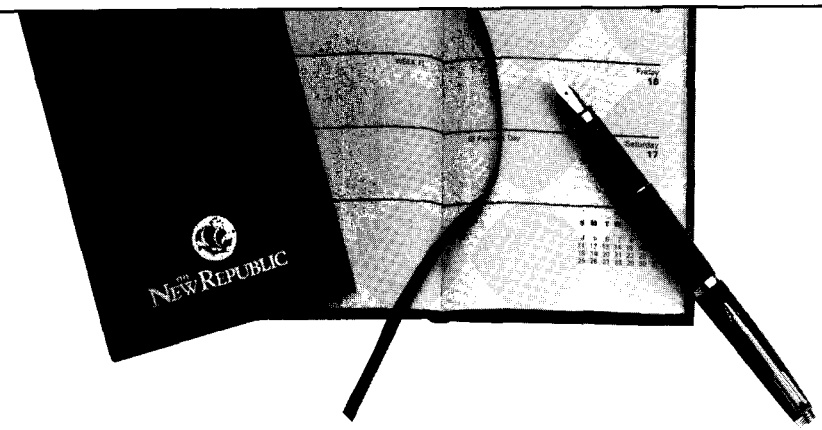
gan, all accounts agree, became angry—so angry he stalked out of the room while Gorbachev was still talking to him. The session, and the summit, ended. Reagan's "dreams" had fratricided, like incoming missiles bunched too closely together. He and Gorbachev had to settle for the Euromissile treaty, which would be signed a year later.

Cannon blames Reagan for the failure at Reykjavik. "Reagan," Cannon writes, "clung to his competing dreams of a world without nuclear weapons and a world in which people would be protected from nuclear war by an anti-missile defense." But were these "dreams" really so inherently contradictory? If both sides still had nuclear arsenals, then SDI would indeed be "destabilizing," because it would create an obvious, if conjectural, temptation to strike first: smash the other side's forces, and even a leaky defense might be enough to repel what was left. But if "a world without nuclear weapons" were actually to be achieved, then might not shared anti-missile defenses (of a suitably modest kind) be just what Reagan was saying they'd be—insurance against cheaters or crazies?

In retrospect, it's clear (at least to me) that both Reagan and Gorbachev blundered at Reykjavik. If one of them had given in, both superpowers might be dismantling the last of their ballistic missiles right now. But Gorbachev's stubbornness was less excusable than Reagan's. Gorbachev should have realized that it didn't much matter what he conceded about SDI: once nuclear disarmament was a reality, there would be little political support in the United States for spending hundreds of billions of dollars on exotic space lasers designed to shoot down weapons that were being eliminated anyhow. Gorbachev should have tried to understand why Reagan was so angry: SDI was Reagan's baby, Reagan's pride was at stake, and therefore Reagan was the one who was overvaluing it. Gorbachev should also have realized that Reagan meant what he said about sharing the technology, that on this point, as on the space shield itself, Reagan was willing to brave ridicule and the weight of expert opinion.

All of this is, admittedly, a little moot. Once Gorbachev decided to forgo rule by terror, the arms race was going to melt away no matter what anyone else did. The peace that reigns between the United States and the Soviet Union is obviously more of Gorbachev's making than of Reagan's, whereas Reagan alone is responsible for a domestic legacy that includes, besides a wonderful revival of the American Spirit, a soul-crushing national debt, an ignoble Supreme Court, stark economic stratification,



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mounting racial fear, the impoverishment of public institutions, and a make-my-day brand of social discourse that revels in ugly contempt for losers. Yet none of that (except the debt) is a surprise. We—those of us who voted against him—knew he was going to be that way from the start.

Reagan was the plaything of whichever of his aides most deftly pushed his hot buttons, but on the nuclear question he lurched into leadership—and that *was* a surprise. The same ignorance that made him a pawn in the struggles among his advisers also made him a savant—an idiot savant, to be sure—in the surreal universe of nuclear strategy. He may not have known which end of the missile has the warhead on it, but he was an expert on the end of the world.

It was Reagan's genius to paste a smiley-face on Armageddon's grinning skull. It turned out he didn't view the biblical account of Armageddon as a prophecy of something inevitable, let alone desirable. He viewed it as a sci-fi story, a cautionary tale about a big awful disaster that could and should be prevented. This is a misreading of the text of the Book of Revelation, but Hollywood always rewrites the classics. Too many downbeat endings.

And how was Armageddon to be prevented—or, rather, who was to prevent it? Something McFarlane observed about Reagan is instructive on this point. "He sees himself as a romantic, heroic figure who believes in the power of a hero to overcome even Armageddon," McFarlane told Cannon. "I think it may come from Hollywood. Wherever it came from, he believes that the power of a person and an idea could change the outcome of something even as terrible as Armageddon.... He didn't see himself as God, but he saw himself as a heroic figure on earth." Not as God, but maybe as God's sidekick.

Perhaps, in true Hollywood style, there will be a sequel. The happy ending was not the only unusual feature of our hero's interpretation of the tale of Armageddon. "As Reagan understood the story," Cannon notes, deadpan, "Russia would be defeated by an acclaimed leader of the West who would be revealed as the Antichrist." Residents of Pacific Palisades, beware of strange weather things. What rough and chuckling beast, its hour come round at last, slouches toward Beverly Hills to be born? •

Young Turk

BY PAUL BERMAN

The White Castle
by Orhan Pamuk
translated by Victoria Holbrook
(Braziller, 161 pp., $17.50)

La maison du silence
by Orhan Pamuk
translated by Munevver Andac
(Gallimard, 339 pp., 150 ff.)

Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* begins with a preface signed by one Faruk, explaining that the story to come was dug up from a seventeenth-century archive in a village outside Istanbul, has been rendered into modern idiom, and should not be weighed down with too many speculations about contemporary politics and East-West relations—which is, of course, a backhanded invitation to try out precisely those speculations, and indeed speculations of every sort. It is an amusing preface. It is a sort of theater curtain, dangling to arouse anticipation. And if it mystifies the American reader on small points—who is this Faruk, and who is the grandfather he invokes, or the dead sister to whom he dedicates the book?—it also gets out of the way quickly, and we are soon enough in a Venetian galley in the seventeenth century, where we are about to be captured by the Ottoman navy and flung into slavery, and all is well, at least for the reader eager for narrative.

Still, there is more to say about these opening pages. Orhan Pamuk was born in 1952 and has already published four novels in Turkey, making him a celebrated figure, his country's leading post-modern writer. *The White Castle* is the only one of these novels so far to be translated into English. But one of his other books, a larger and in some respects a more ambitious work, has been translated into French as *La maison du silence*, or *The House of Silence*. And from this book we can glean a few additional insights into that little dangling preface. The same Faruk who dug up the archive in *The White Castle* turns out to be a main character in *The House of Silence*: a sad sack historian in his mid-30s, an abandoned husband who heads out from Istanbul with his younger brother and sister to spend the summer with their ancient grandmother at her beach-town home. Sometimes Faruk does put in a hard day's research in the Ottoman archives, where eventually he will turn up the story of *The White Castle*. Mostly, though, he sits in his grandmother's dining room and hides a bottle under the table. The younger people hang out at the beach, carry on flirtations, keep misplacing a beloved *Best of Elvis* album. They live the kind of modernized life that is marked by drunken car rides, American-style. While American young people, however, might do their driving in a stupor of the eternal present, Faruk and his siblings are shadowed, drenched really, by the Turkish past.

What is this past—for the Turkish intelligentsia, or at least for the characters that Pamuk has chosen to show? It is not, as might be supposed, the dead hand of ancient tradition. The past is a tradition, instead, of anti-tradition: a past that was meant to overcome the past. The grandfather who is invoked in Faruk's preface to *The White Castle* presides like a ghost over *The House of Silence*—long dead, still creaking around the house, especially in the unforgiving reveries of his bitter widow, the grandmother. We are meant to see in him a somewhat representative figure of historic Turkish progressivism, a character evocative of Kemal Atatürk, the modernizing dictator from early in the century. (Turkish readers will notice, I am told, that several details of grandfather's life mirror Atatürk's.)

But the modernizing zeal, back in the days when grandfather was alive, didn't necessarily lead to glorious triumphs. Grandfather's thinking tilted to the simple side. He tortured himself with a question: Why has the Islamic East lagged behind the West? And all his life he came up with the answers of a village atheist. It

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was because the West knew that God is dead. It was because Westerners reject the idea of an afterlife and know that death means nothingness. It was because the West knows particular facts and theories that could easily be provided to the East, too, if only someone would apply himself to the task. After which would come, in the East as in the West, the radiant future.

So grandfather devoted his life to compiling precisely the necessary information to enlighten the East, and he set out to write it down in what he projected to be a forty-eight-volume encyclopedia. He was going to be the rationalist messiah: half Quixote, half Casaubon. Even his wife couldn't stand his foreign fanatical Jacobin obsessions. His political agitations got him exiled from Istanbul, which is how the family ended up in the beach town. But life in the provinces only doomed him more. He was a physician by profession, yet building a practice among the peasants of the beach region was nearly impossible, and he ended up with a reputation for being in league with the devil. Like his grandson to come, he took to drink.

In the 1980s world of *The House of Silence*, on the other hand, grandfather's creaky old-fashioned ideals have willy-nilly been realized, haven't they? His own grandchildren do seem to be the rationalist marvels that he envisioned. Enlightenment is theirs by natural inheritance. They don't have to torture themselves to think secular thoughts. The lonely beach town is nowadays filled with prosperous concrete houses. German tourists throng the hotel wearing fezes and watching belly dancers. Yet what good is this triumphant modernity? Everyone is steeped in problems. The ferocious battles between tradition and change go on as before, except in the useless violent form of rival gangs and killings, Communists versus fascists. Faruk's cousin, a nasty kid from the poor side of town, joins a gang of fascist extortionists; his sister takes up communism.

Such is the radiant future! The conundrums of East and West are not looking good. From the preface to *The White Castle* we discover that poor old Faruk, the boy historian, who had quite enough troubles in *The House of Silence*, seems to have more, and has been expelled from the university. We are reminded that his young sister has died, not from natural causes either, as we know from the other novel, and we bite our fingernails over the fate of modernity and the East—even while we are supposed to be settling down for the story to come. And only four pages have gone by!

And so *The White Castle* begins, and the modern age disappears, and the naval battles of the seventeenth century are upon us. An Italian university student, seized at sea by a Turkish attack, finds himself enslaved in Istanbul by his own Turkish look-alike, a master called Hoja, whose greatest desire is to learn the wisdom of the West. The Turkish obsession with Western knowledge turns out to antedate the present by hundreds of years. Hoja wants to learn everything the Italian has ever studied, to gorge himself on the several mysterious branches of Western knowledge—on science and engineering, on the information that might lead to military advantages for the Ottoman empire, and even on the deeper psychology of the West.

But how to get at these un-Ottoman things? Master grills slave. They discuss chemistry, the stars, the relative merits of Ptolemaic and Copernican systems. They set out to build various contraptions in a spirit of scientific curiosity: a fireworks display, a model of the universe, a clock, a giant weapon. Only who can predict how knowledge will spread? Hoja is eager to share his new scientific learning with the Turkish masses, but when he sets up school, the students get suspicious, and a warm calf's head turns up on the doorstep, and the teaching must be abandoned. Hoja wants to instruct the boy sultan, but the sultan's curiosity is less than dependable. The Ottoman court craves prognostications, not science.

Gradually Hoja caves in to his own culture, as most people would. He does try out a few prophecies, just for fun, and the prophecies happen to come true. He rises to the office of Imperial Astrologer, which was not exactly his original intention. The prescientific world turns out to be a sponge. The elements of Western knowledge that Hoja wrings out of his slave get sopped up like drops, and knowledge itself disappears.

Even in the sphere of the strictly practical, in the military engineering that Hoja and slave undertake, nothing useful comes from their years of faithful labor. Master and slave build a superengine of war, a sort of manpowered tank, or anyway a contraption that people call a "freak, insect, satan, turtle archer, walking tower, iron heap, red rooster, kettle on wheels, giant, cyclops, monster, swine, gypsy, blue-eyed weirdie." And with this monstrosity in tow, the Ottoman empire proceeds to the invasion of eastern Europe. The Turkish army besieges a White Castle in the Carpathians, and the contraption is finally brought into play. But it gets caught in the mud.

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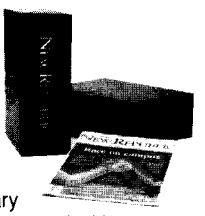

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A single weird product of Western engineering is of no use to the advancing army of the East. Worse: it arouses the superstitions of the soldiers. And like the school and the private tutoring and the effort to go beyond astrology, the invasion collapses in miserable failure. Is this fiasco meant to represent the crucial turning point in the history of Islam and the West, the moment when Islam fell into the stagnation that so much preoccupies Faruk's grandfather, centuries later?

Pamuk's novel brings to mind the view of Bernard Lewis, the historian of Islam, who has argued that the military failures of Ottoman Turkey in its invasion of Europe in the seventeenth century did indeed constitute the decisive catastrophic moment. For up to that fateful invasion, Islam had risen more or less steadily for a thousand years, and Christianity had generally receded, until at last the Ottoman army, having conquered large parts of southeastern Europe, stood at the heart of Europe and laid siege to the gates of Vienna. And the failure was inexplicable. The Westerners had somehow acquired an ability—what was it? science? military organization?—to repel all attacks, and to push the invaders out, and to initiate their own never-ending expansion.

The shock of this unimaginable disaster after a thousand years of success has never entirely disappeared, according to Lewis. It is a primary source of resentment and rage even now, the background to relations between Islam and the West that Westerners themselves never pause to remember. Of course Pamuk says nothing about any of this in his novel. On the contrary, speculations about Turkish history and the rise of the West are precisely what he warns us against in his preface. Yet what can be done? Pamuk brings Hoja, the slave, the sultan, and the army to the gates of an impregnable White Castle in Christian Europe, and the ignominious defeat occurs; and since readers are thinking creatures, interpretations of every sort leap to mind. The sly author has only himself to blame.

Perhaps not everything in Hoja's exploitation of his slave fails so utterly. There is the psychological exploration of the West. Hoja conceives the notion that Western difference from the East consists of something deeper than technical or scientific knowledge—possibly a different sense of identity, a species of self-knowledge that is unknown in the East, possibly a consciousness of sin and shame. So he obliges his slave to reveal his every dream and memory, and while the slave dutifully recalls his childhood and youth in Italy, Hoja responds by recalling his own dreams and memories. The two men sit at a table "like two bachelors telling each other's fortunes to pass the time on endless winter nights," writing memoirs called "Why I Am What I Am" and sharing them with one another. But identity is memory, in Pamuk's notion. The sharing of memories entails a certain blurring of identities, too. Their conversations, their scientific enterprises, their lives together become a sort of mutual demolition, tearing down what makes each one distinct. This yields very little about the secret inner strength of the West. Yet neither is it another fiasco like the march into the Carpathians.

It generates somehow a quiet ecstasy. For the exchange of identities, the mutual introduction to a new life, a new way of thinking, a new language—this is, at least it can be, a kind of love. Faruk, in introducing the book, offers what he calls a mistranslation of Proust, to this effect: "To imagine that a person who intrigues us has access to a way of life unknown and all the more attractive for its mystery, to believe that we will begin to live only through the love of that person—what else is this but the birth of great passion?" The love that is generated by hours of writing and talking at the table teeters for a moment on the homoerotic; the men stand in front of a mirror and touch each other, though with some revulsion and fear. Their love is not really sexual, however. But it is passionate. The novel rises to a sort of love aria of open confession—peculiar, narcissistic, confused between self-loathing and love of the other. "I loved Him," the slave says of Hoja (or is it Hoja of the slave, since separate identities have long been lost?):

> I loved Him the way I loved that helpless, wretched ghost of my own self I saw in my dreams, as if choking on the shame, rage, sinfulness, and melancholy of that ghost, as if overcome with shame at the sight of a wild animal dying in pain, or enraged by the selfishness of a spoilt son of my own. And perhaps most of all I loved Him with the stupid revulsion and stupid joy of knowing myself....

Does this aspect of *The White Castle*, the story of intimate confused passion, suggest still more complexities of East and West? Can whole cultures, like individuals, fall confusedly in love, believing that the other "has access to a way of life unknown and all the more attractive for its mystery"? Cultures can certainly fall into hatred. Undying animosities have kept Europe and the Islamic Middle East at each other's throats for no less than 1,300 years. But where there is hatred might not there be also love, mixed in a little here and a little there, like sugar? The mutual fascination between the Christian-dominated West and the Islamic-dominated East is no small or simple thing. It is so powerful that people sometimes do want to abandon their own identity in a fit of self-loathing or desire for the other. Is that kind of fascination different from passionate love and aren't Hoja, the slave, and Faruk's grandfather all instances of such a love each displaying the foolishness of a lover grandly incapable of taking the measure of the object of his inflamed affections?

One of the appeals of Pamuk as a novelist is that he invites this sort of daffy speculation, not explicitly but by the substance of what he writes. Possible interpretations bubble up spontaneously from his pages. There are novelists who entertain us with their inventiveness and novelists who entertain us with our own inventiveness. Pamuk, with his easy Cartesian cerebralness, manages to do both. Possibly the ratiocination in *The White Castle* carries on a little too much. The book's characteristic image is not the castle, as suggested by the title, but the table, which is a disappointment, given that hard logical tables are less amusing than impregnable white castles. Still, it must be acknowledged that, when the memoir-writing at the table finally engenders its special passions and the narrator finds himself thinking thoughts of love, the cerebral complexities of memory and identity acquire a surprising warmth and ardor. As a philosophical meditation, *The White Castle* is curious and engrossing. As a novel of love, however, *The White Castle* turns suddenly vivid and unpredictable.

The impression that Orhan Pamuk is more than a philosophical novelist is confirmed by *The House of Silence*. Characters and philosophical themes recur in one book and the other, yet far from being extensions of one another, the two novels seem almost to be manufactured of different materials, as if *The White Castle* were a statue and *The House of Silence* a carpet. The latter emphasizes everything that is downplayed in the former. It is a novel of character, not so much of ideas; an interweaving of several stories, not the telling of a single grand tale. *The White Castle* tends to be coolly recited, except for the declaration of passion at the end, whereas large portions of *The House of Silence* are written with a Faulknerian warmth and intensity. (Faulkner is an obvious influence on this Turkish writer.) What possibly can Pamuk's other two novels be like—the

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latest of which, by the way, is currently a best-seller in Turkey and the object of polemics in the newspapers? So in addition to the intrinsic interest in these novels, their entertaining quality, the fascination of their topical themes, and their tendency to excite a certain madly enjoyable spirit of theoretical spritz in the reader, something else attracts attention. That is the author. The man is extravagantly talented. He is prolific. And he's only 38.

PAUL BERMAN is editing a reader on "political correctness" to be published by Dell Laurel in February.

Tellers of the Soil

BY ALAN MINTZ

The Blue Mountain by Meir Shalev translated by Hillel Halkin

(HarperCollins, 375 pp., $22.95)

Bashing the icons of the founding fathers has long been a favorite pastime in Israeli culture. For more than a decade before the Labor Party lost its hegemony in the '70s, the New Wave in Israeli fiction led by Amos Oz had been embarked on an aggressive program of demythologizing. The chief targets were the larger-than-life pioneers who came to Palestine from Russia during the period between the failed 1905 Rebellion and World War I. Fueled by a powerful mix of Hebrew nationalism and back-to-the-earth Russian populist idealism, the pioneering settlers labored to fashion the fundamental political and agricultural institutions of what was later to become the State of Israel.

Along with an aptitude for vision and hard work, the pioneers brought with them a zeal for endless debates over nuances of principle and, more chillingly, a readiness to impose ideology on life. Their actions were often conducted with an air of grandiose self-sacrifice and theoretical self-importance that masked the actual submission to their wills required of those around them. To be a wife or a son to one of these giants meant not to escape unharmed.

Much of Oz's best early fiction (*Where Jackals Howl* and *Elsewhere, Perhaps*) is an exercise in rapping vigorously on feet of clay. The job is done with great artistic sophistication, and with the best techniques in the modernist repertoire; but there is no disguising the fact that the encounter between father and son is not play-acting but a struggle for survival, in which the will of the father remains a potent force. And now a new chapter in the reckoning with the fathers has been opened up in *The Blue Mountain*, an important and immensely entertaining first novel by the younger Israeli writer Meir Shalev.

The substance of the criticism put forward by Shalev is as damning as what we find in Oz, but the judgment is intertwined with affection and humor in such a way as to take the confrontation between the generations to a new plane of engagement. Rather than demythologizing the pioneers, Shalev has taken the opposite tack. He treats the myths *as* myths, and succeeds at a stroke not only in loosening their hold, but also in making the myths serve his purposes as the stuff of stories. *The Blue Mountain* is a virtuoso storytelling performance at whose center stands the very act of converting myths into stories. In this quality, Shalev's volume joins David Grossman's extraordinary novel of the Holocaust *See Under: "Love,"* which appeared in Hebrew some two years earlier. In both books the horrors of history (the travails of the pioneers were horrible in their own way) are dissolved or decentered by the consolations of storytelling. Shalev goes about this differently from Grossman, but taken together their work points to the arrival of a postmodernist temper in Israeli fiction.

The Blue Mountain is Mount Tabor, which overlooks the Jezreel Valley in northern Israel and separates the settlements in its shadow from the sea and the worldly cities on its farther flank. The valley was one of the first areas settled by the pioneers, who drained its swamps and made it into some of the richest farmland in the country. The story is set in a village modeled on a famous moshav named Nahalal. What distinguishes a moshav from a kibbutz is the private management of the small family-run leaseholds; the settlement is run as a cooperative, but there is scope for individual initiative, even competition. This distinction is important, because Shalev's novel is about a group of people who are at once propelled by a collectivist ideology and possessed of romantic self-dramatizing egos. Despite their utter revolt against the benighted decadence of the diaspora Judaism, the village created by the pioneers resembles nothing more than an Eastern European shtetl: a small, intensely provincial community held together by a shared set of beliefs (there religion, here socialism) but torn apart by hatred, passion, and intrigue.

Like a shtetl, too, the village has its own foundation myth. In the hoary ancient days when the Land was still in the hands of the colonists' agents and the effendis, three intrepid pioneers—Mirkin, Liberson, and Tsirkin—asked a young woman named Feyge Levin to join them in forming a peripatetic labor collective. They drew up protocols in which they solemnly committed themselves to sharing wages and chores equally and to "making no improper advances toward their female comrades." Formerly constituted as the Feyge Levin Workingman's Circle, the four labored in the quarries, on the roads, and in the groves, fending off despair and malaria, and snatching moments of playful high spirits. When they founded the village and settled down to become farmers, Mirkin married Feyge, who gave birth to the group's "first fruits," the first children born on the soil of the land.

The heroic and antic exploits of the founders find a devoted chronicler in the person of Baruch Shenhar, Mirkin's grandson and the narrator of the novel. Orphaned at the age of two, when his parents were killed in a terrorist attack, Baruch was taken in and lovingly raised by Mirkin, himself long a widower. The education that Baruch receives at the hands of his grandfather, a wizard in the cultivation of fruit trees, and Pinness, the village schoolmaster who is an expert in entomology, is peculiar. He learns nothing about relating to women and a great deal about crop rotation and the behavior of beetles. His chief source of nourishment is the rich flow of tales—alternatingly touching, grotesque, and comical—told to him by these two men about the Feyge Levin Workingman's Circle and the early years of the village.

The distinctly unheroic present in which Baruch retells these tales rests upon a hugely funny joke. The grandfather designs his death to serve as an act of revenge for the supposed banishment of his son Efrayim, who was disfigured as a commando in World War II and could

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not find a place for himself in the village when he returned home. Mirkin instructs his grandson to bury him not in the village cemetery, but in the soil of his own orchard, and Baruch does so. Because Mirkin was a revered figure in the movement, however, other pioneers want to be buried near him. Soon Baruch is receiving requests from old men and women from all parts of the world, especially America, who consider themselves veterans of the Second Aliyah even if they only spent a few months in Palestine before going on to become factory owners in California. (These farflung comrades indeed made up the majority, for in point of fact only ten percent of the "pioneers" who came to Palestine before World War I ended up staying, and even among those who stayed many committed suicide.) The ex-pioneers from abroad pay large sums of cash for the privilege of being thus repatriated, and Mirkin's farm is quickly transformed into a cemetery called grandly Pioneer Home, and Mirkin's grandson becomes a rich undertaker.

The joke turns on the literalization of a metaphor. At the center of the pioneer vision stood the slogan: self-realization through a return to the earth. The necessary antidote to the sickly otherworldliness of diaspora Judaism and its *luftmenchlichkeit* was a rootedness in productive agricultural work in the Land of Israel, from whose soil all manner of life-giving blessings would flow. Baruch's cemetery is a perfect send-up of all these solemn ideals. After so much bitter struggle against rabbinical beliefs about the afterlife, the veteran pioneers unashamedly clamor to secure their immortality by being interred in the Pioneer Home. It is only in their burial that many of them are "ingathered from the Exile" and given to achieve the aspiration of returning to the soil of the Land.

The village, of course, is outraged. Mirkin has made good on his threat to "get them where it hurts: the earth." Formerly charged with violating the spirit of cooperative farming, Baruch's lawyer argues that just the opposite is true:

> My client quite literally earns his livelihood from the earth. He supports himself by his own labor, considers himself a tiller of the soil, regards the mortuary profession as a branch of agriculture, and uses agricultural tools to excavate, plant, fertilize, and irrigate his prospering business.

What most annoys the villagers is that Baruch makes more money at "farming" than they do.

This idea and its parody embody the double perspective that Shalev's novel offers on the achievement of the founding fathers. The romantic view is assiduously cultivated by the narrator Baruch, the true offspring of Mirkin and the loyal pupil of Pinness. Raised on their stories, he preserves and weaves the tales of their exploits and their shenanigans into an epic narrative that makes myths out of key events and returns to them obsessively. What keeps Baruch's telling from becoming pure hagiography is the affectionate irony with which he treats his subjects and the contrast between the liveliness of his voice and other models of remembering represented in the novel. Meshullam, the son of another founder of the village, for instance, has devoted his life to creating a museum containing the early "artifacts" of the settlement. His relationship to the past is embodied in the prized object in his collection: the huge straw-stuffed hide of Hagit, the greatest milk-producing heifer of that generation. When some revisionist historians question whether there were ever any swamps in the Jezreel Valley, Meshullam loses grip on his sanity and tries to flood the village fields to re-create the fabled bogs whose draining remains the cornerstone of the pioneer myth.

The anti-romantic view is articulated by Levin, the brother of the eponymous member of the Feyge Levin Workingman's Circle. Levin was unsuited for physical work and made a career in the city. When Feyge died shortly after the birth of her third child, Levin left Tel Aviv to settle in the village as the manager of its shop and to help raise his niece and nephews. The escapades of the early pioneers hold no charm for him. From his perspective, the Feyge Levin Workingman's Circle, renowned for its pathbreaking equal treatment of women, was based on a fraud. Mirkin's marriage to Feyge came about as a result of a lottery, unbeknownst to Feyge, held among the three men. For reasons of ideological *amour-propre*, the men could not bear the idea that she would become another's, even though none of them was in love with her. (Mirkin was in love with a woman who remained behind in Russia and who finally comes to Israel when he is an old man.) The further pressure to give birth to the village's "first fruits" forces Feyge, depleted by years of wandering and hard labor, to an early grave.

For Levin, the glorious old days can be summarized pithily: "They humiliated me and killed my sister." Of these two acts, the humiliation of Levin, though the less melodramatic, is arguably the more significant. The taunting and the teasing of Levin for not being a laborer continues even after he throws in his lot with the pioneers and settles in the village. An old hard-working donkey brought from Russia called Zeitser is coddled and showered with all the honors due a true hero of the working classes, while the devoted and diligent Levin is shown no respect.

Levin's resentment speaks for the true majority of the founders of the Jewish state, who were not farming pioneers but industrious and self-sacrificing men and women who furthered the national cause in many other ways. Yet the ideological prestige of the return-to-the-soil banner was so powerful that anyone associated with it was enviably thrust onto center stage. The theatrical image is just to the point: Levin shouts at Pinness that

> you people never had any appreciation of plain ordinary work. You were too busy acting in your great Theater of Redemption and Rebirth. Every plowing was a return to the earth, every chicken laid the first Jewish egg after 2,000 years of exile. Ordinary potatoes, the same *kartoffelakh* you ate in Russia, became *taphuchei adamah*, "earth apples," to show how you were one with Nature. You had your pictures taken with rifles and hoes, you talked to the toads and the mules, you dressed as Arabs, you thought you could fly through the air.

To be sure, Levin's is the animus of the virtuous man left out of the picture, but this analysis is right on the mark. The mystique of the founding pioneers was made up of only one part hard work and many parts of self-invention, self-dramatization, and self-promotion. The socialist Zionist conviction that the New Jew would be reborn from working the Land gave powerful authority—and a near monopoly on arrogance—to the few who realized the ideal, and relegated the many who toiled in less "correct" callings to an ancillary status.

Although he is the keeper of the flame, the narrator Baruch is the best evidence for the unromantic legacy of the members of a generation who comported themselves as if they were characters in a Russian novel. (*A Russian Novel* was the title of the Hebrew original.) As a boy raised by his grandfather, Baruch is the direct creation of the elder pioneers; yet apart from his oxlike stamina and stubbornness, he has inherited none of their passion and their vitality. The present time (the early 1980s) in which Baruch tells the story is flaccid and played out. He has nothing better to do with himself than tend his cemetery and tell his stories, and like many native sons he has moved away from the village. Around him the surviving pioneers decline into blindness, enfeeblement, and dementia.

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And tragically, it is only they whom he can love. Baruch is incapable of knowing love for women, or, for that matter, of forming bonds with anyone of his own generation. His sterility is a recoil from the absence of a mother and from the messy misalliances he has observed among the pioneers; his cousin Uri reacts in the opposite way by compulsively seducing most of the married women of the village. Both are responses to something fundamentally amiss in the lives of the great pioneers. *Their* grand passions were ideas and the earth; and they loved women, badly, only as reflections and handmaidens of these first loves. How else could Feyge have been given to Mirkin by lottery?

The Blue Mountain, in sum, juxtaposes the romance of the pioneers with an anti-romantic view of motives and consequences. Yet what Shalev does with this opposition is something very different from what we would expect from Oz and the other New Wave writers. Shalev declines to embark on the enterprise of demythologizing. He approaches the conflict between generational values not as a dialectic to be resolved, but as material to be woven into story. This is a rich book, but it is not a deep one. The characters are vivid and memorable rather than complex; and the ideational framework holds no surprises.

But can Shalev tell a story! He spins his yarn very adroitly, alternately pulling the thread taut and letting it play out. There is a mesmerizing and Scheherazade-like quality to the narrative, suggesting a world in which the tale and the telling go on forever. The story is moved forward through an accretion of episodes that are repeated and returned to through the perspective of different characters. Baruch's bovine quality makes him the perfect narrator for this kind of story: unhurried, loyal, observant, and rather stupid. He receives and replays all the stories he has been told by his grandfather and by others but does not—indeed, cannot—comment on them. The commentary is provided by the stories themselves; the inclusive jumble of the narration means that the ideological rhetoric of the pioneers is forced to rub shoulders with the anecdotal reality of their lived lives. Baruch is certainly not an intentionally comic narrator, but his very earnestness makes the stories run the gamut from wryly ironic to the unabashedly hilarious.

The many amazing things that happen in this novel are related with an utter absence of amazement, as if they were simply inscribed in the being of the world. The disfigured Efrayim, Baruch's uncle, walks around the village with a 2,900-pound bull on his shoulders. Zeitser, the veteran pioneer donkey, is treated by the narrative as a person rather than an animal, and his views are often quoted. Shifris is a pioneer who left Russia with others at the beginning of the century but decided to walk overland; his arrival is still expected daily. When *The Blue Mountain* appeared in Hebrew, much was made of Shalev's debt to the "magical realism" of García Márquez. The borrowing is a real one, but to Shalev's credit the technique is kept to the soft edges of the novel, and it is fully domesticated within the Israeli world of which he writes. Besides, it is not so very strange that elements of nature—trees, livestock, fields—should be alive in the experience of a generation that gave itself up so fully to a return to the land.

The urge to fantasy is kept in check by a concomitant fascination with the shapes and the surfaces of the material world. Shalev writes a noun-saturated prose filled with references to the realia and the arcana of entomology and agronomy. This is a novel that keeps its ear, quite literally, close to the ground, and it is in picking up this mute language of rustling and murmuring, as well as the louder ideological noises above ground, that Hillel Halkin's translation demonstrates its superb grasp of idiom and nuance.

In the end it is the fusion with the land that remains the most vivid experience in Shalev's novel. The pioneers may have theatrically cooked up the romance of the land, but they succumbed to its spell in a way no one could have predicted. Their attachment was not to the soil in general, or even to the Land of Israel as a whole, but in a radically parochial way to the land of their valley, their village. *The Blue Mountain* is a regional novel in the true sense. Most of the characters never venture beyond the shadow of the mountain of the title, nor do they feel any need to do so. They move in a world that is similarly separated from the great wars and scandals from which Israeli history is usually constructed. There is not a mention in this book of the establishment of the state and the War of Independence.

Shalev's novel, in the end, is about a kind of attachment to Israel that we hear little of in contemporary journalism. This is not the messianic commitment of the adherents of Gush Emunim to redeem all the land promised by God in the Bible, nor is it the political nationalism capped by the establishment of a sovereign entity with its own army, flag, and diplomatic corps. It is, for want of a

Cancer Ward

The dark plant at the end
of the long corridor
has not been watered for days.
Light streaming through
the venetian blinds encircles
it with bands of dust.
A fly with one wing
hangs from the edge
of the topmost leaf.
Another fly is buzzing a zigzag
up and down the window,
ticking against the glass,
trying to get out.
Beyond a set of double doors,
around a corner,
a man is coughing violently.
Behind another door,
marked NO ADMITTANCE,
a machine is whirring
and a woman is crying.
A car horn sounds faintly
on the street below,
as if it is coming from
many miles at sea,
muffled by dense fog.
Like a ship returning
from those distant islands
where the dead lie shoulder to shoulder
in white sand
under a full moon.
The islands where thousands
of these plants grow
in endless, silent fields
and nothing—not even the black wind—
can ruffle their heavy leaves.

Nicholas Christopher

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You deserve a factual look at...

Loan Guarantees for Settlement of Soviet Jews

Should the U.S. Play a Role in this Humanitarian Enterprise?

Only a few months ago, the world was able to watch the thrilling spectacle of the airlift of 15,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel. But the rescue of the Ethiopians, heartening and important though it is, is really only a "sideshow" in the ongoing saga of this ingathering. The greatest challenge facing the Jewish state today, almost even more daunting than the implacable hostility surrounding Israel and the ever-present military challenge, is the ingathering of the Soviet Jews.

What are the facts?

■ For years it had been one of the great policy objectives of the United States vis-a-vis the Soviet Union to allow the free emigration of its citizens. Of all the nationalities in the Soviet Union, the Jews are by far the most endangered and the most anxious to leave the country. Finally, the gates have begun to open – a little slowly at first, but then wider and wider. Under U.S. immigration laws, only a small number of these Soviet fugitives are able to come to our country. The vast majority plan on settling in Israel. And that is as it should be. Because the state of Israel has one single purpose: the ingathering of Jews, especially those that are persecuted and who are in need, from all corners of the world. And it doesn't make any difference, of course, whether they are "Europeans" or whether they come from the Arab countries, from Asia or, as now in the case of the Ethiopian Jews, whether they are black Africans.

■ So far, about 300,000 Soviet Jews have arrived in Israel. A total of about 1 million are expected within the next three years. Since the population of Israel is about 5 million, that is equivalent to the United States having to absorb about 45 million new immigrants – more than the population of the states of California and New York combined – and that within a 3-year period! And the United States is a rich country and an immensely large one. Israel is a poor country. Its per capita income is less than $10,000 per year and more than one-half of the country's budget is dedicated to defense. And it's small: the size of the country is one-half that of San Bernardino County in California. The Soviet immigrants come virtually penniless, because they may not take more than $100 out of the country. There are no ready jobs, and there is no ready housing. It is a daunting and almost overwhelming task to absorb these people. It is estimated that it will ultimately cost more than $50 billion.

■ But Israel is determined to overcome this challenge, to build the 260,000 new housing units that will be needed, to build the 12,000 new classrooms, to create the 360,000 new jobs, and to integrate the 1 million Soviet Jews into Israeli life, just as it has done with over 1 million previous immigrants. Israel and world Jewry will carry virtually all of the cost of this absorption and will create the massive additional infrastructure needed to sustain a population increase of over 20% in just two or three short years. In this fiscal year alone, more than $6 billion or 20% of Israel's budget will go toward absorption of immigrants. The American Jewish community will have raised more than $4 billion and has agreed to co-sign a further $900 million guarantee to help with these costs.

■ There is one urgent matter, however, in which the assistance of the United States will be needed. Israel will ask the United States to *guarantee* (not to grant, not even to lend) $10 billion for housing, funds that will be needed, in $2 billion yearly installments, over a 5-year period. This is a financial transaction that is virtually without risk and at virtually no cost to the United States. In contrast to many of the developing countries, Israel has never defaulted on a loan and has never asked for "forgiveness" of any indebtedness. It has a perfect payment record. American guarantees of this $10 billion loan are absolutely required in order to make the orderly absorption of Soviet Jews into Israel possible.

The matter of the loan guarantees will be before Congress almost immediately. The United States, a country of immigrants just like Israel, has tremendous moral responsibility in this matter. As with all other financial assistance to Israel, the funds under this guarantee will be used only within Israel's 1967 borders. No funds will be used to settle Jews in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"). But the United States must focus on the humanitarian nature of this enterprise. It must not be "linked" and must not be conditioned upon any political issues, such as the procedural questions of the peace process, the question of settlements in the administered areas, or any other "concessions". Israel, like the United States, is a beacon of liberty and of hope. The United States should approve the $10 billion loan guarantee to Israel – its best friend and staunchest ally in the world – and should assist, virtually without risk and expense to itself, in one of the greatest liberation movements of our times: the exodus of 1 million Soviet Jews and their orderly absorption in Israel.

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better term, an autochthonous attach ment, a mythic pre-Judaic connectio that derives from the earth and is roote in the soil of a particular place. Befor the politicization of Palestinian nationa ism, we used to hear, quite plausibly much about the primary attachment o Palestinians to the fields and springs o their particular village or town rathe than to some larger entity. The Jewis settlers may have come later, but a Shalev's wonderful novel illustrates h force of their return engendered no less fierce and no less embroiled an attach ment to the land.

ALAN MINTZ is Robert H. Smith Professo of Hebrew Literature at the University o Maryland and the author most recentl of *Banished from Their Father's Table: Loss Faith and Hebrew Autobiography* (Indian University Press).

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

acknowledges that Mr. Lee writes badly but he makes rash assumptions and stil manages to get caught up in what must b a bandwagon phenomenon. When h says, "Spike Lee's talent is by now a kin of cultural fact" and "by and large Le directs forcefully, keenly, with the assur ance of someone born to do this work, he's engaging in puffery, not criticism Mr. Lee's talent is surely open to as muc question as his cultural enshrinement unless, of course, Andy Warhol's defi nition of contemporary celebrity i the measure. As for his "assurance," th isolated sequences Mr. Kauffmann adduces as evidence constitute not proof but a minimum requirement for ever approaching film production.

Can I be the only one to feel that Mr Lee and his film are the beneficiaries o a tacit double-tiered system of critica judgment, which reserves one set of cri teria for blacks and another for whites? A related set of special circumstances exist in Hollywood and surprises no one. *Jungle Fever* got off the ground only because the executives at Universal Studios thought they could successfully mesh affirmative action with the bottom line; in this formula the race of the filmmaker becomes as important as the product itself in generating revenues. I can't imagine a sequence of events in which a white director would have proposed and actually made this film, but if by some fluke one had, the few critics reviewing the result would have dismissed it out of hand for what it is: the overwrought groping of a film-school student.

ARTHUR PHILLIPS
Los Angeles, California

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Sleeping with the enemy

IN ALL THE RECENT BROUHAHA over the "outing" of alleged homosexuals, one fallacy has remained virtually unchallenged. It's the notion of a simple "closet" and the crude assertion that one is either in it or out of it. I know of no one to whom this applies. Most homosexuals and lesbians whose sexualities are developed beyond adolescence are neither "in" nor "out." They hover tentatively somewhere in between. And most outings are not essentially about dragging someone out of anything. They are crude assertions about invariably complex people, which have very little to do with the nature of someone's sexuality, and all to do with who controls the disclosure of it. Properly understood, outing is not a resolution of something, a final act. It's when the intricate steering of self-disclosure, with which every homosexual is intimately familiar, is suddenly seized by someone else, when one's ability to describe oneself, one's freedom to say who one is, is peremptorily taken away.

MOST GAY LIVES, BY VIRTUE OF the culture we live in, know dozens of such moments of powerlessness. I remember in my early 20s being casually asked in the back seat of a car by an open-minded acquaintance, "Are you gay?" and not being able to answer yes or no. The question was as benign as it comes, but the effect was temporarily terrifying. The panic, for most homosexuals, periodically returns: when the subject crops up and the throat becomes intolerably dry; when the insult is hurled across the street, and shame mysteriously returns. What's worse is that one is complicit in such moments: without a sense of embarrassment, there would be no loss of power, no handing over of control. But the trauma is real nonetheless. It is the sense of asphyxiation you feel when someone defines you without your consent.

THIS ELEMENT OF UNCONTROL, OF course, is not exclusive to homosexuals. The racial slur has a similar effect. It demeans a person because it defines him against his own particular self-image. The word "nigger" stings because it hammers an intricate human achievement into a communal blur. It erases dignity because it denies individuality. But with homosexuals, this expression of contempt can find a way of sounding legitimate. Because homosexuality is largely invisible, the act of control can often be disguised as an act of revelation. Declaring someone gay can come in the guise of news; it can be sanctified with the mantle of fact. And what, after all, can be wrong with a fact? And who can oppose it, except those who are themselves "homophobic," who choose the hypocrisy generated by shame over the liberation afforded by fact?

IN THE WORLD of intimacy, however, there are few such facts. Human sexuality is too mysterious and too fluid to be reduced to such simplicities. Honesty can destroy relationships; candor in the affairs of the heart is almost always a means to assert some sort of control. And there is little moral difference between a straight person forcing one to hide one's identity and a gay person forcing one to declare it. But the most disturbing element of the outing craze is not simply that it is initiated by gay people, whose lives, one might think, would be testimony to the cruelty of others' control, but that it is done in the name of political conformity. All the targets have been gay people at odds with the agenda of fringe activists. All have been justified as ways of exposing "hypocrisy," but have, in fact, been ways of enforcing control. A recent outing, for example, was of a congressman who had a 100 percent legislative rating from a leading gay group, but who still failed to please one particular activist. In New York a politician felt obliged to declare that he was HIV-positive, after a mounting whispering campaign to that effect. In another case a man was outed for whom there was no proof of his hostility to homosexuals, and some evidence that he may have been doing good, but who was employed by an institution that is anathema to the outers—the Pentagon—and so was fair game. No crimes were cited, except an imputation of cowardice. Regardless of his own motives, the taint of collaboration (he is a civilian in the Defense Department) was enough. In one last-resort defense of the outing, a leading gay activist actually said: "[His] silence in the last couple of years has hurt us. And I think his silence now is hurting us." His *silence*?

THERE ARE TIMES AND PLACES, TO be sure, when silence is indeed a culpable act, and the way in which the Pentagon treats gay and lesbian soldiers in its ranks is a disgrace—brutal in its bigotry, callous in its effect, as this magazine has repeatedly pointed out. But the sacrifice of another gay man, deemed "guilty" before proved "innocent," as an indirect means to undermine the policy requires an ethic of a peculiarly twisted kind. One is reminded of Orwell's remark about the morality of those "always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled." One is also reminded of all those other political movements around the world in which silence is invariably an unacceptable form of conduct. They demand an active, even eager, participation in a particular politics, a mouthing of certain words, a performance of certain actions. Inaction is the same as treachery; weak souls in the ranks are treated with greater viciousness than any putative enemy. But they have rarely been sympathetic to a liberal society. And they have never been tolerant of homosexuals.

NOT SO LONG AGO I THOUGHT this was an exaggeration about some fringe elements in the gay movement. Whatever the differences among gay men and lesbians, there was always a sense that everyone was essentially on the same side. Now I'm not so sure. It's not so much that, within the gay world, there are now those who have assumed the rhetoric of the historic enemy. Nor even that, in the heat of battle, some have taken to desecrating others' religious beliefs and practices, embracing the very forms of intolerance that homosexuals, of all people, have historically shrunk from. It is that they have attacked the central protection of gay people themselves. They have assailed the ability to choose who one is and how one is presented, to control the moment of self-disclosure and its content. They have declared that the bonds of common sympathy must be sacrificed to ideology, that the complexities of love and loyalty and disclosure can be resolved by the uniformity that is the classical objective of terror. The gleam in the eyes of the outers, I have come reluctantly to understand, is not the excess of youth or the passion of the radical. It is the gleam of the authoritarian.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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